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LADY LAUGHTER

BY

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CHAPTER I.

THE house faced a country road which ambled along the slope of a shallow valley in the Berkshires, and which, in the course of time, reached the village of Stockton, two miles away. A hedge of privet, head-high and symmetrically rounded on top, hid the house until, discovering a white trellised gateway, one outwitted it. Beyond was a wide space of untroubled lawn from which arose the long, low, ivy-splayed front of the house. It was of creamy-white stucco, unbroken by beams; two stories in height, wide of eave, suggesting in the dignity of its simplicity a New England farm-house of a hundred years ago.

The ground plan resembled a broad and squatly letter H. The central portion, one room in depth, contained a wide hall, opening front and rear upon the grassy lawn, flanked on the right by a drawing-room and on the left by a library. These rooms were square, spacious, and casemented east and west. Beyond the drawing-room, forming one upright of the H, were a dining-room and service-quarters. The letter was completed on the other side, beyond the library, by a study.

This room, fairly representative of the rest of the house, was forty feet in length and something more than half as wide. Light and space seemed the key-note of the study, for, in spite of the green and white striped awnings stirring languidly outside the windows, the

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room was filled from end to end with soft, clear light, while the furniture, of which there were so few pieces that at first impression the room seemed too empty, was so disposed that one might have used the big soft-piled rug for a training track without once colliding with anything. Save for a large portrait above the fireplace, the walls were bare of pictures. Even the big, broad-topped table-desk at the front end of the study bore none of the devices approved of writers. A solid glass ink-well, a pen-tray, a small desk-clock, a shallow green-glazed ash-tray, a blotter, a glass cube holding down an orderly pile of paper—these alone mitigated the smooth monotony of the oak surface. Beside the desk-chair, a rack held many books, from whose tops protruded slips of paper, as though, having for awhile valiantly resisted the sack of their treasured wisdom, they had at last been forced to yield, and so were flying white signals in token of capitulation.

The victor sat at the desk, pen in hand. If it is true, as has been said, that a man may be known by the house he lives in, then, judging Richard Hollidge by his study, we may conclude, and more or less correctly, that he was methodical, orderly, slightly ascetic, impatient of frippery, honest, and a bit utilitarian. Taking no cognizance of his surroundings, judging him merely as we see him in the chair, we should likely describe him as a very good-looking, well set-up, carefully-dressed chap who is possibly a year or two younger than he appears, and who takes himself and things in general a trifle too seriously.

CHAPTER II.

RICHARD paused in his occupation of running lines of small and ridiculous legible writing across a sheet of white paper and allowed a flicker of annoyance to ruffle the surface of his brow. Through the open windows beside him came the crisp sibilation of carriage-wheels on gravel, the creaking of springs, the susurration of voices, followed again by a sound of wheels on the drive, that faded at last into the murmurous silence of the June morning, leaving Richard with his thoughts once more at sea.

For days he had been peculiarly, unwontedly susceptible to disturbing sounds. Possibly, could he have closed all the windows, these sounds would not have reached him; but, although it was still the first week in June, the weather was extremely warm. Richard wondered if it could be possible that he was losing interest in his work. The thought had occurred to him ere this, but he had thrust it aside as being too impossible for credence. Why, only a month ago he had started out with the utmost enthusiasm, with an eager impatience that had sent his pen flying! Fearing that social demands might interfere with the progress of his work, willing, too, to get away from the noise of the city, he had

dragged Aunt Letitia out here to The Hermitage a whole fortnight earlier than usual. And with what result? He had wasted a week in settling down, and then, having become settled, had struggled for a second week against a most inexplicable mental supineness.

Opening a drawer at his right, he lifted out a pile of manuscript and laid it before him. So much, written in the library of the old brick house at Beacon Hill. Here was the title-page: "The Principles of Good English, for the Use of Schools and Colleges, by Richard Greenough Hollidge, 3rd, A.M., formerly instructor in English in Harvard University." And here was the Preface, seven closely written sheets of it; the Introduction, fifty-odd sheets of that; and here was the First Book of Part I; and here—he rearranged the sheets almost affectionately—here were the first six chapters of Book Two. So far, so good; but there still remained to be written almost two-thirds of the work, and he had agreed—rashly, as it seemed now—to deliver the complete copy to the publishers by the first of September. Ordinarily, that would have given him time and to spare, but when one lags through less than three thousand words in a fortnight, ten weeks loom startlingly short. He shook his head as he replaced the manuscript in its drawer.

In Boston he had been able to work with the rattle of carts, the whirring of automobiles, the screeching of noon whistles, and all the babble of city noises beating against his windows; yet here in the hushed solitude of the country the least sound annoyed him, broke the current of his thought, and—yes—absolutely irritated him! It was absurd, perplexing! Had he ever been troubled with nerves, he would have blamed them now, but he never had been. Twenty-eight years of age, he had always taken good care of his body, knew nothing of dyspepsia save its name, and held himself superior to all physical or mental twinges. But to-day—why, hang it, he felt as he imagined Aunt Letitia must feel at the approach of a thunder storm; just as though—just as though something was about to be struck!

He arose, and, applying a match to the pipe which hung idly from his mouth, puffed irritably as he crossed the old-blue and rose field of the big Gorovan carpet and stationed himself with his back to the fireplace. The portrait above the mantel was of Richard's mother, who had died when he was still at St. Mark's. She had been a sensationally beautiful woman, and it was not difficult to trace the resemblance between the face on the canvas and the face beneath. The principal points of likeness were extreme width between the eyes and sensitiveness of nose. Beyond that, Richard was more like the Hollidges than the Dallens. His mouth, unhidden by a short-clipped mustache, resembled his father's, and so, to a lesser degree, did his chin. His eyes and hair were brown, the former very clear and direct, and the latter commencing a retreat from the forehead.

While there was more of the scholar than the man of action in his appearance, yet most of the favorite indications were lacking. For instance, there was no hint of the stoop popularly supposed to belong to the man of books. On the contrary, the back was very straight, and the shoulders square enough and broad enough to suggest that they had done other things than lean over a desk. As a matter of fact, their owner played a rattling good game of tennis, rode fairly, could handle a gun at a pinch—but seldom did—and was an enthusiastic and mediocre golfer, whose brilliant work with a putter could not make up for poor drives and approaches. After these confessions, it is hardly necessary for me to state that his face was not unhealthily pallid, nor that he did not exhibit either that negligence of attire or lack of attention to the person usually ascribed to the artistic or scholarly.

Meanwhile the subject of this gossip, finding the inclination to return to work still wanting, puffed away on an empty pipe and stared through the doorway to the vine-shadowed porch. He was recalling a conversation with Aunt Letitia held at the dinner-table the evening before. He had casually bewailed his inability to concentrate on his work, and to his surprise Aunt Letitia had seized upon the subject with avidity.

“My dear,” she had declared convincingly, “you are trying to do too much. I’ve seen it ever since we came. You need a change of scene. Why not ask some one here to—to amuse you, Richard? There’s that Mr. Craigie——”

“Tom Craigie! Good Lord!”

“I thought you liked him, Richard. He seems very good company—so amusing and full of spirits——”

“Amusing, yes, if you want to be amused. I don’t. Tom Craigie *would* settle it! Or anybody else, for that matter. As it is, it is hard enough; with anybody in the house, visitors, I’d—well, I’d simply have to give up. If you love me, Aunt Letitia, don’t ask any one out here. At least, not yet. Perhaps later—— I realize it must be dull for you, though, and perhaps by August——”

“Don’t trouble about me, my dear. I’m quite contented to get away from folks for awhile. I was only thinking of you; thinking that perhaps if there was some one here to take your mind away from your work now and then——”

“That’s just what I don’t want. There are enough distractions without importing any. I shall be all right in a day or two. I dare say it’s partly the weather; it is hot for the time of year. And possibly I have n’t been getting enough exercise.”

Richard, recalling the conversation, smiled. In all the years Aunt Letitia and he had been together—which was ever since his mother’s death—he had never succeeded in convincing her that seclusion and

quiet were essential to the literary worker. Aunt Letitia was firmly convinced that her nephew labored too hard, and, could she have had her way, would have filled the numerous empty rooms upstairs with guests for the sole purpose of affording him relaxation and amusement. He smiled again. Aunt Letitia was a dear, and he feared she was finding her journey to Boston this hot day decidedly uncomfortable. He glanced at his watch. Well, she would soon be there; it was nearly half-past eleven. Then he frowned, observing guiltily and almost distastefully the desk at the end of the room. The morning almost gone and nothing to show! Moved by a sudden impulse, he strode across the floor, pushed aside the screen door, and emerged on to the porch.

This porch was wide and ran the length of the study. Floored with rough brick tiles, and set along the edge with round pillars supporting beams, it was unroofed save by the clustering foliage of vines, through which the June sunlight dripped to form quivering pools and traceries on the tiles beneath. Before him spread the flower garden, hedge-enclosed on all sides, with grassed paths that wound and wandered through an orderly tangle of color and greenery. At the far end of the garden a wall of tall shrubs, syringas, spiræas, and others, showered white petals over the grass. Beneath the happy treble of many birds sounded the ceaseless boom of the bees, while over all hung the warm, spicy fragrance of flowers and sun-bathed soil. White and cool against the shaded green of the farther shrubbery, gleamed a circular seat, roofed, guarded on either side by a column bearing the laughing head of a faun. One step took Richard from the porch to the turf, and in a moment he was following a curving path between beds of shrubs and old-fashioned flowers, dimly conscious of a sense of relief and of truancy. As he came on between the glorious tangles of blossoms and leaves, ever nearer the garden seat, the fauns guarding their shallow temple watched and leered. And then the shadow cast by the tall hedge enveloped him gratefully, the goal toward which all paths led was but a half-dozen paces before him, and he raised his eyes toward it. And then, since it is but natural that one walking in a garden of which he believes himself to be the only inhabitant should be surprised at suddenly coming face to face with another, Richard stopped short and stared.

CHAPTER III.

SHE was seated on the marble bench in an attitude that proclaimed ease and content. Leaning back slightly against the cool stone, her hands were clasped loosely in her lap, and a pair of slender ankles, clad in tan of silk and leather, were crossed in front of her, beyond the edge of the dark blue gown. The gown, of foulard silk, quite plain, followed closely the lines of a small, slim figure, and ended well below the neck.

in a white lace collar which revealed a V of warm ivory. She was bare of head, and the red-brown mass of her hair—and there seemed a great deal of it—was pushed away from her forehead in a soft wave, below which the oval of her face gleamed creamily against the bluer white of the marble. A pair of violet eyes under high-arched brows and long dark lashes looked forth in quiet amusement, while below a small, straight nose two red lips were set in a demure smile. Beside her on the stone bench writhed a long white glove. Its fellow lay crumpled on the tiles below.

All this, you may be certain, Richard did not see, or, seeing, did not comprehend. Nor, you may be equally certain, did he continue to stand and stare for any such length of time as it has taken me to picture very baldly the vision confronting him. No, he recovered with commendable celerity, and, as the young lady on the garden seat continued to regard him with smiling equanimity, silent and inquiring, for all the world, he thought later, as though he and not she were the trespasser, he addressed her.

"Good-morning," he said politely. "Were you—are you—that is, can I do anything for you?"

Whoever she was, and in spite of the fact that she was most evidently a lady and eminently attractive, it was necessary for her to understand that she had no right to make herself at home in his garden in this unconcerned manner, and he managed to convey as much by his tones. Undoubtedly the young lady was properly impressed with the fact of her misdemeanor, for—she laughed! It was a bubbling, golden, contagious little laugh that seemed to spring as naturally from her lips as water from a spring, and Richard felt the contagion and smiled before he thought. And, having laughed, the young lady sat up briskly and nodded her red-brown head until the wealth of tresses swayed happily.

"Oh, yes," she answered, and her voice seemed somehow to belong there with the flowers and the sunlight, "yes, you can do a great deal for me." And with that she arose to her absurd height of five feet and a few inches and held out a slim hand to him. "You're Dick, are n't you?"

Hesitantly Richard took the hand, but, "Dick?" he echoed startledly. "I am Richard Hollidge. You wished to see me?"

Again came the laugh, and as she laughed she closed her eyes just a little, a trick that added piquancy to a face already well supplied with that quality. "You have n't changed a mite, have you?" she asked. "But very well, then, Richard—Cousin Richard."

"I—I beg your pardon?" he stammered. "May I ask who—er—"

"You don't mean that you don't know me?" The laughter died suddenly out of her face, and the red mouth drooped disappointedly.

"I—I—" He felt himself a brute, a scoundrel, something far too low and mean for naming, and, realizing it, he resented it. What right had this absurd girl with her silly laughter to intrude on the privacy of his garden and make him feel like—like—

"And so you've forgotten me!" She shook her head sadly. He could almost have sworn that the violet eyes grew misty. There was something disturbingly plaintive in the manner in which she slowly drew her hand from his. Then, tremulously, with tears in her young voice, she added simply, "I'm Betty."

"Oh!" he said blankly. He waited for her to continue, but evidently she considered that she had told him sufficient, for she was regarding him now expectantly, hopefully, watching for recollection to burst upon him. A smile hovered at the corners of her mouth, ready to take instant possession. And yet all he could say was, "Betty? Betty who? Betty—er—what?"

And then, instead of lapsing into tears, which was what he was fearfully afraid she would do, she burst into laughter! And just when, puzzled and a little bit annoyed, he felt a frown gathering on his forehead, the laughter died away as suddenly as an April shower and only a smile remained, a demure, provoking, mocking smile, and,

"I guess," she replied demurely, "it's Betty Uninvited!"

CHAPTER IV.

"I'm afraid," Richard said again, with chill politeness, "that I don't understand."

"Of course you don't," replied the girl cheerfully. "Come and sit down, and I'll tell you the whole story." She perched herself again on the garden seat, folded her hands in her lap, crossed her absurdly slim ankles, and smiled invitingly. Richard seated himself a safe yard away, and observed her expectantly and a trifle distrustfully. She shook her head.

"That will never do," she sighed.

"I beg your pardon?"

"How can you expect me to lay bare the innermost secrets of my heart if you look at me in that way?"

He smiled slightly. "Is that necessary?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so. I must begin at the beginning and tell you all." She sank her voice to a thrilling whisper. "You have a cousin!"

Richard shook his head. "I think not," he replied calmly.

"Oh, don't be so fussy! A second cousin, then."

"I believe so; several, I think."

"But one particular one!"

"Really? Then, I am to understand that you—er——"

She nodded. "Yes, I am it—her—she! My name is Elizabeth Carolyn Lee—Carolyn with a y, if you please!—of New York City."

"Oh, then, you're Betty Lee? I beg your pardon, I'm sure. Of course I should have known. I—er—I'm very glad to see you, Miss Lee."

Betty made a face. "Well, there's no good reason why you should have remembered me, I guess, because when we last met I was a wee tot in short dresses." Richard unconsciously glanced at her present gown. "I mean real short," she explained, intercepting the glance, "somewhere around my knees. And you were a very important young gentleman in prep school. And that must have been nearly fifteen years ago. And of course I've changed since then."

He smiled. "Undoubtedly. I fancy we both have."

She regarded him appraisingly and shook her head. "I don't think you have—much. Of course you're older, and you have a funny little bristly mustache, and you wear glasses, but I think I'd have known you in a crowd, Cousin Richard. Now, don't you want to know what I'm doing here?"

"If—er—it is not impertinent."

"There! Thank Heaven you have a sense of humor, after all! I was afraid you had n't. You know you used not to have."

"Really? I must have been—well, rather a bore, eh?"

"You were, to be frank." She laughed and nodded. "And you had no use for girls. But, somehow, I liked you, just the same, and I was quite broken-hearted when you went back to school."

"That was kind of you," he laughed. "From what you say, it would appear that I was not especially deserving of—liking."

"I don't think you were," she replied candidly. "And that's one reason I came."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, I wanted to see whether you were—well, whether you had grown any more human!"

"Oh! And—er—have I?"

"Oh, lots! And I'm so glad, because, you see, it—it justifies my former—shall we say affection?"

"Pray do," he responded gravely.

"Well—and now what were we talking about? Oh, yes, you were about to demand what I am doing here in your garden without a ticket!"

"On the contrary, Miss Lee, I was about to express my pleasure. And we don't take up tickets until you go out."

"Thank you. That will help a lot. But—are n't you going to be curious? Are n't you just dying to know why I'm here and everything?"

"I am."

"You'll be awfully surprised when I tell you," she warned. "Surprised and—and maybe a little shocked."

"I shall strive to conceal the surprise, and hope to survive the shock."

"Well, then—" She swung her shoes out and regarded them gravely for a moment. Then she turned a laughing face to him. "I've run away!"

"Run away! From what?"

"Everything! My devoted parents, my palatial home, Europe—everything." She viewed him in sparkling triumph. "And here I am!"

"So I see," he responded dryly. "And the—er—motive?"

"The motive? A taxi from the dock, then trains, more taxis, and, finally, a funny tumble-down carriage to your hospitable door."

Richard brought forth his pipe and slowly filled it. Then, "Don't you think you'd better tell me all about it?" he asked. "Then we can see what's best to be done."

"Oh, there's nothing to be done, Cousin Richard. You need n't worry about that. But I guess I'd better explain a little more—what's the word?—lucidly. You see"—she turned and faced him, hands clasped about one slim knee—"you see, here's how it happened. You know Papa—I mean, you know how determined he is. Of course you do, though; every one does. Well, he was determined that I should go abroad this summer. I was determined I should n't. Mama—well, Mama did n't exactly take sides, but she sort of sneakily favored Papa. And I think that was downright treacherous, don't you?"

"Not knowing the exact status—"

"Well, it was. I told her I did n't want any more Europe. Think, Cousin Richard, I've Europed every summer except one since I can remember! And I don't know what this country looks like west of Philadelphia! I—I just said I did n't want to go, and—and I would n't. It was n't as though they needed me; and there were two or three places I might have stayed at home. The Parkinsons asked me to Canada with them, for one thing. But Papa thinks that nobody nice ever remains on this side of the ocean after the middle of June, and would n't hear of my staying behind. So—so just before the boat sailed I calmly walked down the gangplank, stepped into a taxi, and lit out!"

"But, my dear young lady!" exclaimed Richard, dropping ashes on his knees in his agitation. "Your parents will be frantic with anxiety!"

"Oh, no, they won't, because I sent a wireless just as soon as I was sure the *Campania* was out of the harbor. So that's all right. And I wrote a letter and sent it by the next boat. The letter explains everything beautifully."

"I see. And the wireless message? Was that—er—explanatory?"

"Yes, I said, 'No Europe for me. Look for letter at hotel. Staying with Bradfords. Love. Betty.'"

"And did you get a reply?"

Betty nodded cheerfully. "From Papa. 'Conduct most reprehensible. Follow next sailing without fail. Wire departure.'"

"And the next sailing?"

"Has sailed."

"But—but surely you don't mean to disobey——"

"Cousin Richard," she replied gravely, "I am twenty years of age. I am *not* a child. I shall *not* go to Europe."

Richard considered, frowning at his pipe. Betty watched him in apparent breathless suspense; only her eyes suggested that possibly anxiety was not uppermost in her mind.

"Then you intend," asked Richard after a moment, "to visit the—er—Bradleys?"

"Bradfords. I did intend to, but when I reached their house yesterday noon I found it closed up tight. Wasn't that horrid?"

"Then you are on your way to them now?" Richard knew she was not. Away down deep inside of him somewhere an awful premonition was taking shape. Betty shook her head cheerfully.

"No. You see, I have n't the faintest idea where they've gone. Of course I can find out, but it will take time; perhaps a week, perhaps two."

"Oh! Then—may I ask—er—what your plan is?"

Betty's eyes opened wide in surprise. "Why, I thought of course you understood, Cousin Richard! I've come to visit you!"

CHAPTER V.

It was all explained. He knew now why he had felt restless all the morning, unable to work, shadowed by a consciousness of impending misfortune. It had arrived. The blow had fallen. After this, he would never scoff, at premonitions.

Nevertheless, he met the shock like a hero. There was not even a quiver. He removed his pipe, glanced at it interestedly, and said calmly:

"I see."

"Of course there's nothing else to do," said Betty, a bit hurriedly. "I simply could n't stay at a hotel, could I? Not for days and days? I did last night, but it was terribly stupid and lonesome. I might go to the Parkinsons' after a while; I'd have to find out first if it was convenient, and I don't know just what part of Canada they're in. I think, though, it's somewhere on the St. Lawrence River. And I suppose there are other people who would take me if I knew where they

were, but I don't. Every one seems to be out of town. I never knew folks to leave so early. I think it's perfectly absurd, don't you? Well, when I saw what I was up against—I mean, when I saw what a fix I was in, I of course thought of you and Aunt—Aunt—”

“Letitia,” offered Richard.

“Aunt Letitia. I knew you'd be glad to have me with you until I could arrange things. And it's such a comfort being with one's relatives in time of—of trouble, is n't it?”

“H'm.”

Betty's face fell, and there was a suggestion of a sob in her voice. “Cousin Richard, I don't believe you *are* glad!” she charged. “I—I don't believe you want me here!”

“Not at all! I mean—er—I'm most delighted,” he assured her hurriedly. “I was only thinking—”

“What, please?”

“Well, you see, it's a little awkward—just at this time—”

“Awkward? You mean you are expecting guests?”

“Good Lord, no! I mean that—that—well, as a matter of fact, Aunt Letitia has gone to Boston to remain overnight.”

“Yes,” Betty nodded. “So the maid told me. But that won't matter, will it? Sophie—is n't that her name?—will look after me, Richard. You need n't put yourself out a mite, really.”

“I had n't intended—I mean, you don't understand, Miss Lee. There are—h'm—such things as—er—conventions.”

“Conventions? You mean, Aunt Letitia has gone to a convention? Don't tell me she's a suffragette!”

“I mean nothing of the sort,” responded Richard shortly. “I am trying to point out the very evident fact that it would scarcely do for you to remain at The Hermitage—”

“Is that what you call it? It's a very pretty name, I think. And appropriate, too; sort of out of the way and all shut in by hedges, you know.”

“As I was saying, it would scarcely do for you to stay here in the absence of Aunt Letitia.”

“Oh!” Betty observed her shoes thoughtfully. “You think—it would n't be proper. But—but we're cousins, and—”

“We are not cousins, and even if we were—”

“We're second cousins, and that's the same thing—almost.”

“I'm afraid that has n't much to do with it,” replied Richard gently. “The fact remains that it—er—would hardly do.”

“Oh, bother! Don't you ever consider anything but facts? They're such horrid, uninteresting things!”

“At any rate, they're necessary things, Miss Lee. I'm awfully sorry, really. At any other time—”

"You're not sorry, and you're ticked to death that you can get rid of me!"

"Now, really, that's hardly fair!"

"Yes, you are! And just for that I shan't go! I don't care if Aunt—Aunt What's-her-name is away. You simply can't turn me out into the road to—to starve and—and sleep under hedges!"

"Great Scott, I have no intention of seeing you starve! Please be sensible. Can't you see—?"

"That I'm not wanted? Oh, yes, I can see that." Betty rescued her glove from the ground and smoothed its length across her knees. "And I do think that when folks are cousins—any way, relatives—they might be a little kinder to each other."

Her face was very doleful, and Richard's heart smote him.

"At least," he announced brightly, "we can have some luncheon together, and then settle on what is best to be done afterwards. Perhaps you could—er—find some of your friends by telegraphing. You must be tired after that ride from New York. Suppose we go to the house, and I'll have Sophie show you a room. Would n't you like to lie down awhile before luncheon?"

"I'm not a bit tired," she answered listlessly. "Only disappointed—terribly disappointed."

"I—I'm very sorry," he murmured. "But, of course, you see—?"

"I suppose so," she responded sadly. The violet eyes seemed misty as she shot a pathetic glance at Richard. That perturbed gentleman lowered his gaze and blinked. After all, was n't there some way out of it? Hang it, you can't turn a young girl, and a sort of relative at that, away from your house like—like a book-agent or a peddler! If only Aunt Letitia—"

His thoughts were cut short by an exclamation from the girl. "That's it!" she announced in triumph, kicking her feet most undignifiedly and waving the glove. "Were n't we two sillies not to think of it?"

"Of—what?" he asked startledly.

"Why," she beamed, "it's the simplest thing in the world! All we have to do, Richard, is telegraph Aunt What's-her-name to come home at once!"

"Telegraph Aunt Letitia!" he ejaculated.

"Of course! Why do you suppose we did n't think of it before?"

"But—but she intends to remain in Boston overnight!"

"And I intend to remain here overnight," laughed Betty. "So you see, my dear cousin, it's up to you! Now, don't be a horrid, *please!* You know you want me to stay and visit you. Think of all the way I've come! And I have n't a dress to my back!"

"No dress!"

"Just this and a silk negligee," she responded cheerfully. "You see, I could n't get away with anything more than a bag. I *had* to leave my trunks on board. Richard, you have n't the heart to turn me out of doors with just one gown and a negligee! Think what I'd look like after a week, sleeping in ditches and under hedges!"

"But, my dear young lady——"

"Don't you think you might call me Betty?"

"Er—I can't ask Aunt Letitia to turn about and come back the minute she reaches town! It—it would be absurd!"

"Very well. Just as you like. For my part, I can do without Aunt Letitia very nicely."

Richard eyed her askance. She swung her feet, hummed a tune, and smiled blissfully at the sunlit garden. After a moment, with a sigh,

"Well," he temporized, "we—we will discuss it later. Allow me to suggest that we go to the house. Sophie shall show you to a room——"

"Don't trouble, please. I know the way about. You see, I had nothing much to do, and so I snooped. Besides, it is n't nearly time for luncheon, is it? Don't you think that maybe we'd better get that telegram off to Aunt Letitia right away?"

CHAPTER VI.

AN hour later they were seated at opposite sides of the luncheon table. Betty had preëmpted Aunt Letitia's place.

"I'll pour the tea," she announced. "May I ask the cook to make me some coffee, Richard?"

"Of course. I beg your pardon. Please ask for anything you want. Perhaps I should have told them to prepare something extra for you. You see, I don't eat very heartily at noon; it's so soon after work."

"Work? Oh, you mean your writing. There's plenty of luncheon for me, Cousin. I *am* hungry, though. You see, I did n't have any money left after I'd bought my ticket, and so I could n't indulge in the luxury of breakfast this morning. That reminds me, Richard: Sophie paid the driver of the carriage. Will you give her the money, please? I think it was two dollars."

"Do you really mean that you've had no breakfast?" he exclaimed in amazement and horror.

"Not a bite. I'm having it now. Hence the coffee."

"And you ran away from the boat without any money?"

"Oh, no, I had a little—about fifty dollars. I knew you would let me have some until I hear from Papa. You will, won't you?"

"Naturally. But surely fifty dollars was enough to last you twenty-four hours?"

"Um—not quite. It takes such a lot for taxis and tips; and then there was the hotel bill and my railway ticket and a stateroom to pay for. Besides, I had to buy—one or two little things in New York yesterday. Really, when I come to think of it, Richard, I don't believe I ever made fifty dollars go so far! I—I'm a little bit extravagant. Papa says so—when he's grumpy."

"Suppose that when you arrived here you had found the house closed up. What would you have done then?"

"But I knew it was n't closed up. I telephoned to Boston and found you were here. And that's another thing that cost. I think it was something like two dollars for that."

"Whom, pray, did you telephone to?"

"To Mr. Craigie. He knows you very well."

"Tom Craigie? Then, he has n't gone across yet?"

"To Europe? No, and"—Betty smiled demurely—"I don't think he is going—now."

"Not going? He told me not more than three weeks ago that he was most assuredly going. I fancied from what he said that he had some important business to attend to. He was to have sailed to-day or—"

"Yesterday, Richard. You see, I told him beforehand."

"Told him? Told him what?"

"That I was n't really going."

"Oh!" Richard viewed her blankly. "So that's it?"

Betty nodded gently. "I—I think so. You like him, don't you?"

"You've stayed behind so as to—that is—"

"No, truly, I did n't! He did, but I did n't. Don't you think he's terribly nice and awfully handsome, Richard?"

"How long have you known him? He has never spoken to me of you."

"Not long. We met first last month in New York at the Applethorpes'. He dances divinely. Have you ever seen him dance?"

"I never have, to my knowledge," answered Richard, without enthusiasm. "Tom is my friend, but I can't say I approve of this sort of thing."

"There is n't any 'sort of thing,'" responded Betty, with a laugh. "He's been very nice to me on several occasions, and—and quite attentive, and when I just had to find out whether you were in Boston or here I just naturally telephoned to him."

"I don't think that was—er—very nice. It looks as though you had arranged to remain in this country to—er—be near him. First thing you know, he will be out here after you."

"Yes, he said he'd probably get you to ask him out for a while," replied Betty calmly.

"Oh, he did?" Richard's lips set grimly. "I think there's a disappointment due Mr. Thomas Craigie."

Betty smiled untroubledly, and buttered a triangle of curly toast. Betty's method was novel to her companion. Balancing a large piece of butter on the edge of the toast, she bit off the butter in such a way as to leave the toast practically unscathed. He estimated that one slice of bread would serve Betty for something like a quarter of a pound of butter!

"When," asked Betty presently, "do you think Aunt Letitia will get that telegram?"

Richard, looking concerned, helped himself to a second glass of milk—an unusual indulgence. "It is hard to say. In fact, it has occurred to me since sending it that it may not reach her at all. I sent it to the house. Aunt Letitia was going there as soon as she got to town, and it is quite possible that she left there before the telegram arrived. In which case it is extremely doubtful that it will find her."

"Then, had n't you better send another one to—to some other place?" asked Betty.

"Unfortunately, I don't know where to send it. She spoke of taking luncheon at The Touraine, after which she was to do some shopping. I believe she intended spending the night with some friends, probably the Prescotts. Not anticipating the necessity of—er—communicating with her, I was, I fear, inattentive. It is most annoying."

"Well, any way, we've done our duty, have n't we?" said Betty consolingly.

"Possibly, but that does n't relieve us of the—er—embarrassment," returned Richard dryly. "I think I had better try the long-distance telephone, and see if I can get word to her at the hotel or the Prescotts? I'd better call up the house too. Will you excuse me a moment? It takes some time to get a Boston call."

At two-thirty Aunt Letitia was being paged at The Touraine and without success. At three Richard's caretaker informed him that Miss Dallen had been and gone and was not expected again. At about four Mrs. Prescott's voice assured him faintly over the wire that while she would have been delighted to have Aunt Letitia spend the night with her, she did n't expect her and knew nothing of her visit to town. If, however, Aunt Letitia arrived, she would tell her to call Richard up immediately. Richard hung up the receiver with a gesture of despair, and reported the result to Betty, who was curled up in a corner of the big divan in the library. Betty expressed sympathy, but seemed only mildly interested.

"So now the question is, what are we to do?" stated Richard.

"I don't see that there's anything we *can* do," replied Betty. "You would n't care to telephone the police, I suppose?"

"I should not," answered Richard shortly. "Besides, as—well, as you will, of course, be going before long——"

Betty sat up very straight on the divan and shook her head energetically. "My dear Cousin Richard, please disabuse your mind of any such notion. I am *not* going to be thrust forth into the cold world to satisfy your old-fogeyish ideas! It—it's perfectly absurd! Why should n't I remain here to-night, for goodness' sake? Is n't the house full of servants? I never heard anything so ridiculous! You're wretchedly inhospitable, to say the least."

"It is n't a question of hospitality," replied Richard exasperatedly. "It—it's a matter of common decency. Besides, as you have voluntarily placed yourself in my—er—care, I am responsible for you to your parents."

"That's nonsense! I am quite capable of looking after myself."

"I regret to have to say, Miss Lee, that your conduct during the last twenty-four hours prohibits me from agreeing with you."

"I think you're very disagreeable. You're not a bit nicer than you used to be."

"I am sorry to have to appear inhospitable, Miss Lee, but you must certainly understand that it is impossible for an unmarried girl to remain overnight unchaperoned——"

"Would it be all right if I were married, Richard?"

"At least," he responded dryly, "I should feel the responsibility less."

"Then, let's be married! That's such a simple way out of it!"

"The word 'simple' is well chosen. If that is the best solution you can suggest——"

"It is n't; merely the easiest," laughed Betty. "I have a perfectly good solution, Richard."

"I am relieved to hear it. It is——?"

"Why, since we must n't remain here together—although, my dear Richard, I'd promise to be quite well-behaved—it occurs to me that it would be an easy matter for you to spend the night somewhere else."

"I!" he gasped.

"Certainly;" and Betty smiled sweetly across at him.

"But—where the deuce can I go?"

"Where the deuce can *I* go?"

He turned to the window and observed for some moments the well-kept lawn that spread away to the hedge and the tree-lined country road beyond. Finally,

"Very well," he said, with chill politeness. "We will arrange it so. I can doubtless find accommodation for the night in Stockton. I believe there are rooms at the small hotel there, such as they are. Of course you realize, however, that your solution is not entirely satisfactory,

since any one not conversant with the real facts of the case will presume that—er—I spent the night at home."

"Any one knowing you well, Richard," responded Betty sweetly, "would never suspect such a thing."

"Possibly. But I warn you now that the whole thing is—is annoyingly—er—irregular. If it is ever learned of, it may occasion a great deal of unpleasantness, Miss Lee."

"Rest assured, Mr. Hollidge, that I shall do all in my power in such a case to protect your fair name."

Richard bit his lip and tugged at his mustache. Then he bowed. "Now, if you will pardon me, I have some work to attend to. Please make yourself comfortable, and ring for anything you want."

"What I want," said Betty sadly, "can't be had by ringing, I fear."

"Er—and what is it?" asked Richard suspiciously.

"A kind word," faltered Betty, her eyes hinting of tears.

Richard passed into the study, closing the door firmly behind him. Then came the sound of a key turning in a lock. Betty arose from the couch with a little quiet laugh and walked to a window.

"He'd have sworn in just another minute!" she murmured.

An hour later Richard opened the study-door cautiously, and sighed with relief at finding the library deserted. In the telephone-booth he rattled the hook impatiently and indulged in many gruff "hellos." Finally: "Give me the hotel in Stockton. I don't know the name of it. . . . Hello! who is this? . . . McClintok's Hotel, eh? Well, this is Mr. Richard Hollidge. . . . No, not College, *Hollidge*. H-o-l—. . . All right. I want a room to-night—hello! . . . I say, I want a room to-night at—. . . No, room—a *room*! . . . Yes, a room overnight, with a bath. . . . Well, without a bath, then. . . . Hello! Do you get that? A room for Mr. Hollidge to-night. . . . Yes. . . . Yes. . . . Naturally, a single room. Do you think I'm twins?"

Then a bell buzzed in the servants' hall, and a maid hurried in.

"Maggie, tell Curran to have the runabout at the door at eight to take me to Stockton."

"Oh, sir, there ain't anything happened, is there?"

"Happened? No, what should happen? I—er—I'm spending the night in the village, that's all."

"And," he assured himself bitterly as he climbed the stairs to dress for dinner, "it's enough!"

CHAPTER VII.

DINNER at The Hermitage that evening was a quiet affair. Richard was studiously polite, but uncommunicative. Betty, quite willing to let

bygones be bygones, attempted for a while to maintain a one-sided conversation, but found the task too difficult, and subsided into silence with the arrival of the roast. Nevertheless, she ate a good dinner, with apparent enjoyment. At the conclusion of the meal, they adjourned ceremoniously to the porch outside, and Betty presided over the coffee-machine. Richard, after asking and receiving permission, lighted a cigar. There was a little breeze from the south that flickered the blue flame of the lamp and brought an enjoyable relief from the heat of the day. Tree-toads were piping, and once Betty thought she heard the shrill note of a katydid. Afar off a whip-poor-will was sounding his plaintive song. Betty sighed contentedly.

"I think it's perfectly lovely here," she said. "And I just know that I shall sleep like a top to-night. How does a top sleep, Richard?"

"I have n't the faintest idea," he replied.

"If you were flippant, you might have said tip-top. Do you take sugar?"

"Thanks, no."

"Don't get up! I'll hand it to you. There! Is it strong enough?"

"Quite, thank you."

Betty piled three cubes of sugar in a diminutive cup and trickled a few spoonfuls of coffee over them. Then, settling herself comfortably again and sipping at the concoction, "Richard," she asked, "do you just *hate* me?"

"Certainly not, Miss Lee."

"We-ell, you dislike me awfully, though, don't you?"

"I'm afraid I have n't—er—"

"Please don't say it! I know it's going to be something very disagreeable. When you say 'er' like that, I know what to expect. You *do* dislike me. And I'm sorry. I wanted you to like me heaps. You see, you're the only man cousin I have."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. And a man cousin is so sort of—of satisfactory. He's just unrelated enough to be nice to you—if he likes you, of course—and just related enough not to be—silly. You see what I mean, don't you?"

"Dimly, I think."

"Yes. Now, you and I could be awfully good friends—that is, if you wanted to—and there would n't be any nonsense, would there?"

"Would n't there?" asked Richard politely.

"No. I mean—well, you could n't fall in love with me, could you?"

Richard smiled for the first time in hours. It was the faintest sort of a smile, but Betty found it encouraging.

"You could n't, could you, Richard?" she insisted.

"My dear young lady—"

"Betty," she pleaded.

"Very well—my dear Miss Betty, your charms are undeniable, but, as you wisely observe, the—er—consanguinity—"

"Oh, Richard, I never did!"

—"Between us happily precludes the possibility of the consequence you mention."

"Oh, dear, is it as bad as that?" she lamented. "Still, we're only second cousins, and perhaps that might make a difference. On the whole, I'm sort of glad we're seconds instead of firsts! Are n't you?"

"I can't truthfully say," replied Richard, with a slight laugh, "that being termed a 'second' brings me any great amount of pleasure. It's—er—scarcely complimentary, is it?"

"Depends on what kind of a 'second' you are. Mrs. Martin refers to her present husband as her 'second,' and declares that second husbands, like second thoughts, are best. I should think it would be awfully funny to have a second husband while your first one was alive, should n't you?"

"Funny? H'm! Rather indecent, I'd say."

"At least, awkward? But Mrs. Martin does n't seem to mind. She's great fun. You'd like her, Richard."

"I can hardly imagine it."

"You would, though. Will you have some more coffee?"

"No, thank you. I never take more than one cup."

"Oh, do! See how much there is left. Go on; take a chance!"

"If it is n't impertinent, Miss Betty, I'd really like to know where you pick up the—er—somewhat unconventional expressions you use."

"Oh! 'Take a chance,' you mean?"

"And others."

"Are they awful? I suppose I—I hear them. They would n't do in Boston, would they? If you don't like the slang, Richard, I'll try to cut it out—I mean, not use it. What's that?"

"Curran bringing the trap around." He looked at his watch and scowled slightly. Then he glanced at his half-consumed cigar and settled back in his chair. After a moment, Betty said:

"Richard, I wish you'd do something for me."

"If it is anything I may—"

"Don't go traipsing off there to-night. You'll be terribly uncomfortable in that hotel. I asked Sophie about it, and she said it was an awful place. You won't sleep, I'm sure."

"I don't expect to be extremely comfortable," he replied grimly.

"Then, don't go," she pleaded. "You know it's silly. And I'll—I'll apologize for being mean this afternoon, Richard. I'm sorry I said anything nasty. I am, really! You won't go, will you?"

"Please rest assured that I should n't if it were not necessary."

"Oh!" Betty subsided, studying him from the corners of her

eyes. It was really too bad, she reflected, that he took things so hard. He was quite good-looking. She could be very proud of him as a cousin if he was not so—so prim and—and serious.

"I—I shall be a little bit frightened at being left here alone in a strange house," she ventured presently.

"You should have considered that before," he replied calmly.

"I did, only I thought you'd—you'd change your mind about going."

"I am not likely to change my mind when it is once made up."

"No, I suppose not." Betty sighed. "Men are like that. They hate to change their minds, no matter how wrong they may be. I think women are much more sensible that way. A woman doesn't care how often she changes her mind—the more the merrier. Why, I've changed my mind two or three times to-day already!"

"Indeed!"

"Yes." Betty nodded soberly. "I decided once, this afternoon in the garden, that I would n't stay to-night. Then afterwards I decided I would."

"May I ask what caused you to alter your decision?"

"I don't think I'd better tell you—now." She laughed softly. "Some time I will. You don't mind?"

"Not in the least." He laid aside his cigar and pulled himself from his chair.

"Is it late? Must you go now? Could n't you stay just a little longer? It's going to be so—so gruesome all alone here."

"The servants—"

"But I don't want to talk to the servants. And I must talk to some one. Could n't you stay until—oh, just until half-past nine or ten? I'll be sleepy by that time. And it won't make a bit of difference to you."

He looked irresolutely at his watch, frowned, and pushed a button by the glass door. "Maggie, tell Curran, please, to take the trap back to the stable. I shan't want it for awhile. I'll let him know when I'm ready."

"Now, that was nice of you," said Betty gratefully. "Isn't it funny that when people can be nice they're not always nice?"

"Perhaps they'd be a little monotonous," replied Richard, with a smile.

"Is that your reason?" she asked slyly.

He was silent a moment. Then, "I suppose I have seemed somewhat ungracious at times to-day, Miss Lee," he said apologetically. "I hope you will pardon it. The fact is, I—well, perhaps, as we used to say when I was a youngster, I got out of bed wrong this morning."

"Oh, but it was quite my fault," said Betty eagerly. "I've been

horridly trying. I did n't mean to be, but—but I was disappointed. I thought it was such a fine idea, popping in on you like this. I had it all arranged: just how I'd arrive, and what I'd say, and what you'd say, and—it was n't a bit like it!"

"I'm sorry, really. How—er—how had you arranged it?"

"I'm afraid it sounds silly now," she answered hesitatingly. "I was going to get here just when you were finishing breakfast—breakfast with lots of strawberries and nice, thick, yellow country cream. Don't you have strawberries, Richard?" she asked wistfully.

"I believe there are plenty of them in the garden," he replied, "but I seldom eat them."

"I love them! And you were going to get up from the table with your napkin in hand and say, 'Why, if it is n't Betty! Where the dev—where under the sun did you come from?' And then you were going to kiss me—no, I suppose you could n't have done that, on account of being a 'second.' But you were going to be, oh, just awfully glad to see me, and Aunt Letitia was going to say, 'Now, sit right down, child, and have some breakfast. You must be starving!' And I was going to eat two dishes of strawberries and a great big cup of nice hot coffee and—and it was all going to be so jolly!"

"H'm; I see. Unfortunately, we have breakfast at eight in the summer. And there were no strawberries. And Aunt Letitia was n't here. I'm sorry it happened so badly, Miss Betty."

"Oh, but I don't care now, Richard, when you're nice to me. I suppose—I suppose you never ran away from your folks?"

"I think not. I seem to have been a most unadventurous chap in my youth."

"Then, you don't know the feeling I had yesterday when I found the Bradfords' house all closed and shuttered. It—it was a funny sensation. There I was without any one to go to. Our own house was closed, too, you know; servants off for the summer, and not even a caretaker. We used to have a caretaker, but he set beer-bottles on the library table and left their stains, and entertained his friends on weekend parties. So now there's just the burglar-alarm, and a sort of private watchman at night. Then I thought of you, Richard, and cheered up. You see, you are a relative, and relatives looked pretty good to me about that time. I don't mind confessing that for awhile I wished myself back on the boat!"

"You were in rather a difficult predicament," said Richard sympathetically. "And I'm very glad you did think of me—us. And to-morrow, when dear Aunt Letitia returns, we can—er—settle just what's to be done."

"Yes," said Betty cheerfully. "And you won't go off and leave me all alone here to-night, will you? Now that we're friends again?"

"I'm afraid our being friends again, as you phrase it, does n't remove that necessity."

"O-oh," she murmured disappointedly. "We-ell—" She was silent a minute. Then, "Do you like music?" she asked.

"Very much."

"Would you like me to play to you? I can, you know."

"Why, thank you, but—er—"

"Do let me! Come, we'll go to the drawing-room and be cozy."

She held out one small hand, gaily insistent, and Richard, yielding to a sudden mood of frivolity, allowed himself to be pulled from his chair and led through the dining-room to the dimly-lighted apartment beyond.

"Now, you make yourself quite comfortable—oh, no, not in that chair!" Still holding his hand, she looked disapprovingly around the room. "Your chairs are all frightfully up-and-downy, are n't they? Perhaps if you sat in a corner of that be-oo-tiful couch, you could put some pillows behind you—would that do?" She conducted him to the somewhat angular article in question, seated him, thrust pillows behind and around him, deaf to his embarrassed expostulations, and then stood off to view the result. "Now cross your legs. That's better. Sure you're comfy? Well, then, light a cigar."

"Thanks, but I never smoke more than one in the evening."

"Oh, nonsense! You're going to this time. This is a special occasion, the visit of your charming and beautiful cousin. Please!"

Betty took a step toward him, and Richard, fearful that she meant to take matters into her own hands, hastily found his case and selected a cigar. Betty, however, contented herself with arranging a pillow that was trying to escape, and then stood by and waited until the cigar was lighted.

"There!" she said. "You know you needed that. Do you know, Cousin Richard, I'm afraid you don't smoke enough?"

"Well!" he exclaimed.

"I really mean it. Your nerves need soothing. Now, you sit right there and be comfortable. You may talk or not, just as you please. I shall probably talk." She crossed to the piano and seated herself on the bench. "Perhaps you won't like my things, but you must pretend to."

He had doubts himself, but he murmured something polite, and settled back with the comforting thought that it need not last long, that it must be fast approaching the half-hour after nine, at which time he would be free to make his escape. She began with a polonaise of Chopin, and Richard figuratively pricked up his ears. The girl could play! Not merely well, but with feeling and sympathy and a certainty that surprised her audience. From Chopin, after a thoughtful questioning of the keys, she played a minuet of Gahm's, and then, perhaps accept-

ing its suggestion, followed it with a suite of old English dances, dainty and stately and quaint. Now and then, as something pleased her, she half turned to smile across at him. Her face, almost in strict profile as she played, was lighted from beyond by the soft glow of a silk-shaded candelabrum that made strange tones in the coppery tendrils of her hair. The blue gown looked almost black, and the slim, delicately rounded figure within it swayed gracefully as her small hands roamed the key-board. Infrequently, there was a falter as memory failed for an instant. This happened during Chopin's *Fantaisie Impromptu*, and again with the "Contes d'Hoffman" serenade, and finally, with a little disapproving shake of her head, she let her hands fall into her lap.

"Are you frantically bored?" she asked, without turning.

"Far from it. You play excellently well. Please go on."

"I have n't kept it up of late," she said apologetically, "and my memory is awful. What shall I play?" She looked tentatively toward the music cabinet. "Do you know this, Richard?"

Her fingers sought the keys again, and after a gay, brisk prelude her voice joined the piano, so softly, though, that he had to lean forward to catch the words.

When I was one-and-twenty
I heard a wise man say,
"Give crowns and pounds and guineas
But not your heart away:
Give pearls away and rubies
But keep your fancy free."
But I was one-and-twenty—
No use to talk to me.

When I was one-and-twenty
I heard him say again,
"The heart out of the bosom
Was never giv'n in vain:
'T is paid with sighs a-plenty
And sold for endless rue."
And I am two-and-twenty,
And oh, 't is true, 't is true,
And I am two-and-twenty,
And oh, 't is true, 't is true.

"No, I had never heard that," he said, when the last note had died away, and she had turned with a questioning smile. "What is it?"

"'When I Was One-and-Twenty,' from Manney's 'Shropshire Lad' cycle. You know the poems, probably—by Housman. I think it is dear, don't you? There are others, but I remember only one, and that is too sad for to-night. Don't you sing, Richard?"

"I used to—after a fashion," he acknowledged, "but not for some time. I doubt that I could now."

"Won't you try something? Do, please. Find something in the cabinet, and I'll see if I can play the accompaniment."

But he begged off, and after a minute she sang again. Her voice made no pretenses, but it was young and fresh and held a mellow quality that suited the simple air she coaxed from the keys.

As she finished, the sound of wheels on the gravel came through the open windows. Richard looked at his watch and uttered an exclamation.

"What?" asked Betty.

"It's after ten—almost twenty minutes past. Curran has evidently tired of waiting for me. If you'll pardon me now for leaving you, I'll run up and change—"

Speaking, he had reached the entrance to the hall. Betty, watching him from the piano-bench, saw him suddenly pause just beyond the portières and stiffen to sudden attention. Then,

"Why, Aunt Letitia!" he exclaimed.

The screen door clicked to behind a tall woman of middle-age, whose thin, well-bred face, still eminently sweet and attractive, spoke eloquently of weariness. Behind her, Curran set down her bag and stood waiting.

"Will you give Curran some money, Richard, and let him pay the driver, please? No, my dear, I am not a ghost. Boston was like a furnace, and I simply could n't bring myself to staying there overnight. So I had an early dinner and—and—"

Miss Dallen's voice faltered as her gaze, passing her nephew, encountered a startling apparition at the drawing-room door. She closed her eyes.

—"And took the seven-fifteen train—"

She opened her eyes again. No, the apparition was still there! It even moved! She raised a hand weakly and pointed.

"Richard," she said distressedly, "is—is there any one there?"

He turned and looked.

"Oh! I—I beg your pardon! This—this is—"

A strange expression overspread Aunt Letitia's face, an expression that mingled swift relief, vast surprise, and dawning suspicion. The apparition, with a merry laugh, moved quickly across the floor.

"I am Betty Lee, Aunt Letitia." Aunt Letitia found herself limply shaking hands. "I'm Richard's cousin, you know." Aunt Letitia found herself nodding and murmuring. "And I've come to visit you." Aunt Letitia heroically summoned her wandering faculties. She bent and kissed the smiling face.

"Of course!" she said kindly. "So stupid of me, my dear, to be away when you arrived. I'm very glad to see you." Her gaze travelled toward the stairway. "And your mother? I presume she was too tired to wait up?"

CHAPTER VIII.

"COUSIN RICHARD!"

Richard's pen paused, and he raised his gaze from the cream-toned paper to frown inquiringly at the closed door to the library. There was a knock, and,

"Cousin Richard, are you *terribly* busy?" asked a voice from beyond the locked portal.

"Er—I'm afraid I am just now."

"Then, I won't stay but a moment."

After a second of irresolution, Richard laid his pen down with a sigh, crossed the room, and opened the door. Betty, a pencil in one hand and a sheet of paper in the other, entered.

"I'm so sorry to disturb you," she announced, with a radiant smile of apology, "but Aunt Letitia thinks— Oh, what a nice big room!" She stopped just inside the door and gazed about her. "But—is n't it awfully *bare*?"

Richard closed the door. "Possibly," he replied briefly.

Betty shot a look at his countenance. "I suppose I interrupted you just when Pegasus was soaring at his highest," she said contritely. "But I won't stay, Richard. You see, Aunt Letitia and I have been having a nice long talk. Is n't she a perfect dear!"

"Er—quite so."

"Oh, she is! She says she's just tickled to death to have me here!"

"Indeed? You—er—you're certain she used just those words?"

"N-no, but that's what she meant. May I sit down?"

"Of course; I beg your pardon!"

Betty ensconced herself in a severe and angular armchair with a grimace of distaste. "Don't you ever have any *cuddly* chairs?" she asked. "Well, let me see." She swung her feet out and looked at them. Apparently Betty's feet had inspirational virtues. "Oh, we were talking about Aunt Letitia. Well, Aunt Letitia says she thinks I ought to write to Papa and Mama immediately and tell them just where I am."

"I quite agree with her."

"Yes, of course. And I shall cable them, too. But there's no hurry about that, for they won't get to England for four days yet at the earliest. When I do cable, I shall ask them to send my trunks right back. How long do you think it ought to take, Richard?"

"I really can't say. Possibly a fortnight after they get your cablegram."

"But that's awful! Well, I'll simply have to buy new things. And now about the letter. Aunt Letitia and I looked up the sailings, and the *Mauretania* leaves to-morrow noon. Aunt Letitia says that if I get a letter posted at Stockton by two o'clock, it ought to reach New

York in time. So I've been trying to write it, but it's awfully hard work, and I thought perhaps you'd help me. Will you?"

"Help you write your letter?"

"Yes." Betty nodded, smiling her sweetest. "It will take but a few minutes. I never write very long letters. I—I just try to express what I have to say briefly and succinctly."

"An excellent plan," said Richard, with a slight smile. "Still, it seems to me that you should be able to express yourself 'briefly and succinctly' without my assistance."

"But I just can't! I've been trying for half an hour. And it's almost eleven o'clock already." She jumped up and crossed quickly to the big desk. "Bring another chair," she commanded. She seated herself in Richard's place, calmly pushed aside his manuscript, and tried the nib of the pen on her thumb-nail. "Now, you dictate, and I'll write," she announced, dipping the pen in ink.

"But—er—look here," began Richard blankly, seating himself beside her, "I don't know what you want to say! I have n't run away from my parents!"

Betty tapped the end of the pen between two very small, very white rows of teeth, and observed him reflectively. "Then, I'll dictate and you write," she said finally. "But you must help me." She passed the pen to him. "Would you rather have a pencil?"

"Of course," he said, "you understand that you'll have to copy it out in your own writing?"

"I suppose so," she sighed. "But never mind. The principal thing is to get it composed. Now, then—let—me—see. Begin 'Dearest Papa and Mama.' Have you got that down? . . . Let me see. What funny, printy little writing! I wish you could see my writing! It's perfectly terrible. Papa pretends he can't read it. 'Dearest Papa and Mama'—come to think of it, Richard, I guess we'd better write this to Papa. Start again and write 'Dear old Dadums.'

"Dear old"—I beg your pardon?"

"Dadums; D, a, d, u, m, s. I always call him that when I want to make a hit. Of course, he will know right away that it's a touch, but it does n't matter. 'I hope you and Mama had a pleasant trip across. I am quite well and miss you a great deal. But I realize that you will both have a more enjoyable trip—' I used 'trip,' did n't I? 'A more enjoyable visit without me to bother you. I shall be quite all right here at home. As you will see by this paper, I am visiting Cousin Richard Hollidge and his aunt, Miss Dallen, at The Hermitage, Stockton, Massachusetts. It is a most charming place, and everybody is very kind to me, and so glad to have me with them.'"

Betty shot a sly glance at Richard, but that gentleman's face remained non-committal, and if his pen faltered, Betty did not see it.

"I was going to the Bradfords', but found they had left town. So I came here, and like it very much. For the present, you may address me here. My plans are not yet—not yet—perfected. Perhaps I shall join the Parkinsons in Canada, if I can find out where they are.' Now, what else, Richard?"

"Possibly something in the way of—er—contrition would be allowable under the circumstances," he replied dryly.

"Contrition? Oh, you mean about running away? N-no, you see, I went into that thoroughly in the letter I wrote the night before last. There's no use recalling unpleasant things, is there? Shall I say that you wish to be remembered to them?"

"Certainly; my kindest regards to them."

"Oh, wait a minute! 'I hope by the time this reaches you, you will have sent my trunks back, because I have n't a thing to put on. If you like, you can send Higgins back with them, although I shan't need her.'"

"Who, pray, is Higgins?" asked Richard.

"My maid. You see, I could n't run away with her too, because I was afraid if I took her into the secret she would tell Mama. And she would have, too, the deceitful thing! I hope they don't send her. Write: 'I think it would be a nice plan to let Higgins visit her folks in England while you and Mama are on the Continent. She is always talking about going home to see her people, and maybe it would be a good plan to let her have a jolly big dose of it.' There, that ought to settle Higgins! Now write: 'Please cable the office to send me some money right away, because I'm flat'—no, 'because I'm quite out of funds. I hope you and Mama will have a dandy time, and come home feeling fine and fit. Cousin Richard says I am to present his very warmest regards and—and'"—Betty hesitated and cast an anxious look at the scribe—"and tell you how delighted he is to have me with him—and Aunt Letitia.' I think we'd better get Aunt Letitia in there, too."

"I think it would be advisable," murmured Richard.

"Now write: 'Much love from your affectionate daughter, Betty.' Oh dear, what a lot I've written! Do you really think it's necessary for me to copy it, Richard? Papa could read it so much easier as it is, your writing it so very neat and plain."

"Considering that it is your letter, I think you'd better copy it."

"We-ell, all right. Is there anything else you can think of to say? You would n't try to make it more emphatic about Higgins, would you? I guess I'd better not, for Papa might take it into his head that I did n't want her. And if he did, it would be horribly like him to send her. So I guess that's all. And thank you very much. I don't know how I'd ever have got it written without your help, Richard."

Richard grunted.

"Oh, but you did help, really! Now I'll copy this, and then Aunt Letitia and I are going to drive over to Stockton to post it. Will you come, too?"

"Thanks, but I think not. I—er—had some dim notion of doing a little writing this morning."

"But the morning's as good as gone. Do come!"

"My dear young lady," he replied sarcastically, "the announcement may come as a surprise to you, but nevertheless it is a fact that I am supposed to be engaged in the labor of—er—writing a book."

"Oh! Then, you won't come." Betty picked up the sheet of manuscript upon which he had been writing. "'Having before his mind the precise object of inquiry,'" she read with a puzzled brow, "'and having also stated—' What's it about, Richard? Is it a novel?"

"It is a work on English Composition."

"Oh, how nice! I should love to read it. When will it be printed in a book?"

"At the present rate of progress," replied Richard glumly, "about next Christmas."

"You mean, because I interrupted you?" asked Betty untroubledly. "Oh, but of course I'll never do it again. You see, Aunt Letitia has been telling me about it. She says you must have everything very quiet from nine until one, and that no one must go near your study. She advised me not to come."

"And so you came?"

"Yes." She laughed softly as he held the door open for her. "Poor Aunt Letitia! She's dreadfully afraid of you, is n't she?"

"I was not aware that I inspired her with fear."

Betty smiled wickedly. "It does sound absurd, does n't it? Good-bye. If you change your mind about coming with us—"

"Thank you, but—"

Betty, half-way across the library, clapped her hands to her ears. "I know! You never change your mind; so careless of me to forget!"

Just as he closed the door she called. He opened it again and regarded her inquiringly across the width of the library.

"Richard."

"Yes?"

"If you *should* change your mind—"

The door closed with dignity, and the key turned.

CHAPTER IX.

THAT afternoon, Betty having disappeared gardenwards with a book, Aunt Letitia sought Richard and found him in the library, arranging and cataloguing a package of books just received from Libbie's.

"You must have been very much surprised, Richard," she said. He glanced about the room.

"She's in the garden," Aunt Letitia reassured him.

"I was," he replied wryly, settling a book in its place. "Having had no suspicion of her presence, it was somewhat startling to come across her reposing complacently on the garden seat. Complacency, by the way, seems to be a strong point of hers."

"Y-yes. I'm afraid I don't quite understand the relationship. I didn't like to ask her. She seemed to think that I knew all about her. She can't really be a cousin, Richard?"

"She's not. My father and her mother were cousins. Once when I was a youngster Mother and I visited them in New York. I've never seen her since. Some five or six years ago her father was in town, and I had him at the club to lunch. Miss Lee—to use a metaphor not inappropriate—was a bolt from a clear sky."

"She seems—a nice girl, although perhaps a little—a little—impulsive, Richard."

"I think," he agreed dryly, "one might call her that. She informed me this morning that you were 'tickled to death' to have her here; and she apparently intends to remain indefinitely."

"I suppose I did say so, Richard. Of course I was only speaking for myself. She may be disturbing to you—that's what I am worrying about."

"She may. But why worry? She has made up her mind to favor us with her presence for, as nearly as I can make out, at least a fortnight, and worrying won't accomplish a thing. I dare say I can stand it. I can't see but that I shall have to."

"N-no, we can scarcely ask her to go away, can we?" Aunt Letitia's countenance expressed relief. "Besides, she has no place to go—"

"Thanks to herself. Of all idiotic performances! The idea of her running away from the steamer like that!"

"She explains that very nicely, though. Of course, it was not right, but—"

"Ha! She's got you already, has she?"

"Got me?" faltered Aunt Letitia.

"Certainly. I expected it. In a week she will have the entire household under her thumb. She has the—er—the determination of—of—I don't know what. I suppose I could get along, after a fashion, with her here, but"—he sighed gloomily—"it's going to be the deuce when Tom Craigie comes."

"Mr. Craigie! Why, I did n't know you'd asked him!"

"I have n't—yet. But I shall have to. He's in love with her—or thinks he is—I've never seen him get any further yet—and he's

determined to come here, and she's determined to have him. She has n't said much yet, but I can see it coming. This will be a nice quiet retreat when those two are running over the place."

"Mr. Craigie in love with Betty! Why, she has n't mentioned his name, Richard, to me."

"She will when it's time," he said grimly. "Oh, we'll be quite gay and merry here soon. Should n't be surprised if we gave house-parties, with turkey-trots on the lawn and bridge at all hours. Had we better have the ices and salads from New York or Boston? Doubtless, however, Miss Betty will decide that question."

"Richard! I really think you do her an injustice. I'm sure she would n't expect you to ask Mr. Craigie here if you did n't want him."

"N-no, possibly not. She'll convince me, however, that I do want him. Has she—er—suggested any changes in our household arrangements yet?"

Aunt Letitia faltered. "Why, no, dear. That is—well, she did say something about having breakfast on the porch, now that the weather is so warm. It was only a suggestion, Richard, and if you'd rather not—"

Richard shrugged his shoulders. "By all means, let us have it there. By the way, she appears to be very fond of strawberries. You might mention the fact to Curran. We have plenty of them, I believe."

"I will." Aunt Letitia sighed. "I'm so sorry, dear."

"H'm." Richard lifted a book from the box and examined the title-page. "You remarked the other day, Aunt Letitia, that you thought I needed—I believe the word was 'distraction.' Providence seems to have agreed with you. I think I may safely say that the—er—distraction has been provided." He glanced at the clock on the mantel and straightened up, flicking the dust from his hands. "Almost four o'clock! You will pardon me, Aunt? I have just time to change into flannels. Our guest has expressed a desire to play tennis at four."

CHAPTER X.

In the big hall upstairs it was almost always cool, since, with wide windows opening front and back, even the tiniest vagrant breeze could find its way in. The second morning of Betty's visit she sat with Aunt Letitia by the west windows. The green and white awnings fluttered lazily outside, and on the topmost branches of the pear and apple and plum trees beyond the vegetable garden the leaves were a-quiver. Under the windows lay a quadrangle of close-cropped turf, cool-green in the shadow of the house. But in the sun the heat-waves were shimmering, and in a corner of the flower garden, visible over the hedge with its white arched gate, the blossoms were bending their heads under its ardor.

Aunt Letitia, gowned in a fresh summer muslin, leaned back comfortably in a willow chair and plied a needle dexterously over the polished surface of a darning ball reposing in the toe of a gray silk stocking. Betty, at the opposite window, curled with one foot under her in a *chaise-longue*, watched in idleness.

"I suppose you know a great many people in New York," said Aunt Letitia inquiringly, after a pause.

Betty nodded. "Heaps. Some of them are very nice. One gets sort of tired of them, though, Aunt Letitia; they're so much alike in what they do and say. Now, you're different. So is Richard."

"We're very quiet and somewhat uninteresting folks, my dear."

"I don't think you're uninteresting a bit. And I like the quiet part of it. Of course, Richard—"

"What about Richard?" prompted the elder woman, as Betty paused.

"We-ell—has he always been like he is now, Aunt Letitia?"

"Like he is now? Suppose you tell me how he is now."

"Why, sort of serious and—and chilly, you know. Seems to float about on a higher plane and talk down at you. Does n't he ever get really interested in things—little things, I mean, like what he has for dessert, or—or folks?"

"I don't think he cares much for desserts," responded Aunt Letitia, somewhat puzzled. "As for folks, he is really very kind-hearted and generous and thoughtful."

Betty shook her head. "You've been living with him so long you don't understand what I mean. Did he ever get excited about anything? Did you ever hear him swear?"

"Excited? Swear? Bless me, no! I don't think so! Why should he?"

"I suppose he should n't," sighed Betty, "but he would be so much nicer if he only would! Has he ever been in love, Aunt Letitia?"

"N-no, I don't believe he has. Some years ago—there was a sort of an affair—"

Betty clapped her hands delightedly. "Oh, do tell me about it!"

"Well, perhaps he would n't like me to mention it," hedged the other.

"Oh, fiddlesticks! Go on and tell me. Was she—pretty?"

"M'm, not precisely. At least, I never thought so."

"Then, I don't think so either. What was her name?"

"Honor Ferris. She was one of the old South End Ferrises, you know—very good family, my dear. Richard seemed quite smitten with her just after he left college, and for a while it was generally thought that they'd make a match of it. She was a very cultured girl, very well bred, very nice, you know."

"And what happened? Were they actually engaged?"

"I never quite knew whether they were or not. Richard was most attentive all one summer; went to Nahant to be near her. Then in the fall the Ferrises went abroad for the winter—to Capri, I think—and Richard never even wrote to her. So I suppose there must have been a quarrel."

"Maybe she refused him," suggested Betty slyly.

"Refused him!" Aunt Letitia's brows lifted. "More likely he thought better of it, my dear."

"Well, that was n't much of a romance, was it? And since then, Aunt Letitia? Nothing doing at all? Not even a flirtation?"

"Not that I have ever heard of. Sometimes I think—"

"So do I," said Betty, when it became apparent that the thought was not to be divulged.

"What?" asked Aunt Letitia.

"That he ought to marry. It would do him a lot of good. Anyhow, Aunt Letitia, he needs something to stop him in his awful career."

"Awful career? What career, my dear?"

"I mean, the way he's going on. If something does n't happen right away, Aunt Letitia, it will be 'Good-by, Dicky'!"

"Why, what *do* you mean?"

"Don't you see what's happening? He's floating away from you, Aunt Letitia, from this wicked, tiresome, flippant world! Up and up he will go, from one plane to another, until finally, with a last glance of kind and pitying contempt, and his book on English Composition under his arm, he will just fade from sight!"

"I suppose, my dear," sighed Aunt Letitia, "you know what you are talking about."

Betty laughed enjoyably. "Never mind, Aunt Letitia, we'll save him," she said finally. "We'll find him a wife, that's what we'll do. Or—" She paused and considered. "Or maybe what he really needs is a hopeless passion. Do you know any one, Aunt Letitia, he could have a hopeless passion for? I suppose she ought to be married; they usually are, don't you think?"

"Betty, you're positively dreadful!"

Betty reached forward and patted her hand reassuringly.

"I'm not really, Aunt Letitia; but I do like to see you look shocked." She subsided and studied her shoes a minute. "Do you think he minds my being here terribly?" she asked finally.

"Richard? Of course not, my dear. I'm sure he enjoys having you."

"Um; maybe. You'd hardly guess it, though, Aunt Letitia. I should n't want to be a real bother to him, of course, but it seems to me that what he most needs is some one to stick a pin in him now and then. And that's why I think that perhaps I ought to stay. That is, if *you* want me."

"I do indeed," replied Aunt Letitia sincerely. "And I'm certain that Richard, back of his manner, is really as pleased as I am. He—he is n't one to say very much, Betty——"

"But what he says he says perfectly correctly. I know. Now I'm going to find a book and be lazy. Watching you work, Aunt Letitia, has quite tired me out."

Aunt Letitia smiled vaguely as Betty went lightly downstairs, humming an air. Then she shook her head in a puzzled way.

"And at times she seems real sensible," she murmured.

CHAPTER XI.

"ANY way, I made you work," said Betty in triumph, dropping her racket and subsiding on the bench at the side of the court. After yielding to defeat in the first two sets, she had managed to carry the third to deuce games, being finally beaten 7-5. "And if I had something to play in besides this"—indicating the white serge skirt borrowed from Aunt Letitia—"and these"—holding up for inspection one brown canvas "sneaker" purchased in the village—"I could do better."

"You play a very good game," acknowledged Richard, mopping his face with his handkerchief.

"I won a be-oo-tiful silver cup at school once. If it was n't for that beastly slice of yours, Richard, I think I'd stand some show. Could n't you teach me that?"

"That would be revealing trade secrets," laughed Richard. "Besides, you might beat me then."

"Well, I should think you'd be willing to let me win once," she replied dolefully.

"I've offered to give you a handicap."

"I won't have a handicap. That's silly. It's just—just an excuse. If I had something sensible to play in——" She smoothed the white serge skirt over her slim knees. Presently, "Richard," she said.

"Yes?"

"Would you be—oh, just simply heart-broken if I went away?"

"Devastated," he replied cheerfully.

Betty made a face. "Be serious. I mean it. Would you?"

He looked at her suspiciously. "Why do you ask?"

"Because," she answered gravely, "I'm going."

"Going away! What for?" he asked startled.

"Reasons, Richards; lots of them. For one, I don't think you care to have me here very much. I bother you."

"My dear Betty——"

"Yes, I do. I can see it. I interfere with your work. And I do

things you don't approve of. I use slang, and—and I don't construct my sentences properly."

"Nonsense!"

"And yesterday when I put that bowl of flowers on your desk you took them off."

"I—er—appreciated them, really," he stammered guiltily, "but I'm not used to having flowers around—"

"I only put them there because I thought they'd look pretty and maybe lend you—what do you call it?—inspiration, Richard. And you threw them away."

"Nothing of the sort! I merely moved them to the mantel."

"Did you really? I didn't look there. I thought you'd thrown them away. They were pretty, were n't they? And I love flowers in the house, don't you? I'm glad you did n't throw them away, Richard."

"Well—and what else? What other sins do you perform?"

"I make you play tennis when you don't want to, and I come down late to breakfast, and—and sort of disrupt things. I do, don't I?"

"I don't think you have heard me complain of any—er—disruption."

"No, you've been very nice and patient. But I know that you'd be able to work better if I went away. Besides, I've been here four days now."

"But—er—where are you going if you leave here? Have you heard from your friends, the—the—?"

"Bradfords? No, not yet. You see, Richard, I have n't written yet."

"Then, I certainly think you'd better stay here, Betty. As you have—er—placed yourself in my—in our care, I feel more or less—er—responsible for you. Of course, if you have a place to go to and are tired of The Hermitage—"

"But I have n't! I'm not! If I thought you wanted me to stay—if I was certain I was n't bothering you—"

"My dear Betty, you are bothering no one. Both Aunt Letitia and I are—er—very pleased to have you with us, and until you can make proper arrangements to visit friends or—er—join your parents—"

"I won't, Richard! I won't if I have to stay right here all summer!"

"H'm."

"There, I knew it! I knew you did n't really want me! Well, I'm going to-morrow, and you need n't 'h'm' about it any more!"

"Don't be absurd. If you can put up with us all summer, you're quite welcome to stay. In fact, Aunt Letitia is—er—very fond of you, and—"

"Are you, Richard?"

"Am I—"

"Very fond of me, too?" Betty regarded him gravely and anxiously. Richard blinked.

"Why, naturally."

"And you don't want me to go away?"

"Not unless you wish to."

"And if I did wish to, and went, would you be sorry?"

"I—er—would naturally miss you," he replied vaguely.

"Then, I won't go," she said radiantly. "I was n't, any way."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I mean, I was n't going to stay. Just to Boston to buy some clothes."

"Oh!" Richard smiled. "Then, this—er—shock to my emotions—"

"I just wanted to see if you'd care," said Betty laughingly. "And, Richard—"

"Proceed."

"Aunt Letitia is going with me; to-morrow; and we're going to have a perfectly gorgeous time shopping. I've simply got to have clothes! Lots of clothes," she added dreamily.

"Well?"

"Well, you see"—she studied her feet distastefully—"I—I have n't any money, Richard."

"Oh, yes, I see. I shall be very glad to supply that deficiency. How much does a lot of clothes cost?"

"Well, could you let me have—five hundred dollars?"

"What! Great Scott, Betty, are you going to buy out Boston?"

"No, but I need so many things, Cousin Richard! Just think, I have n't anything at all. Imagine yourself without anything at all!"

"H'm; I'd rather not. However, if you must have five hundred, I'll see what can be done. I'm afraid I have n't that much on hand, but I can give you a check, and you can get it cashed in town."

"Thanks. You're a dear. And, Richard—"

"Go on; tell me the worst."

"It's just about dinner."

"What about dinner? Do you mean that you want another five hundred for that?"

"Silly! Of course not! But Aunt Letitia and I will be all alone, and I thought perhaps it would be nice to have Mr. Craigie meet us. Do you think it's quite proper for women to dine alone at a hotel?"

"If they behave themselves. I think I can answer for Aunt Letitia."

Betty laughed softly. "But it would be nicer to have a man, would n't it? You—you don't think you'd like to go with us, do you?"

"I do not," he answered promptly.

"I was afraid you would n't. So I thought of Mr. Craigie."

"Only, of course," he said slyly, "as an after-thought."

Betty smiled. "I'm glad you approve, Richard. I'll telephone him

when we get to town. And in case anything should come up about—about his coming here, Richard?"

"Eh? Oh, I see. You'd like to have me ask him up?"

"Well, he might expect it, might n't he? And it would be so awkward if Aunt Letitia and I could n't say anything—if we had to. Of course, Richard, if you'd rather not have him— Still, maybe you could get more work done if you had some one to take me off your hands. Don't you think so?"

"My dear young lady, if you want that idiot up here, pray invite him; but don't, please don't, try to make me believe that my happiness and future prosperity depend upon it!"

"Then, you don't want him?" asked Betty dolefully.

"Want him? Why—er—confound him, no!—that is, if you want him—"

"I don't unless you do," she answered disappointedly.

"Tell him," said Richard dryly, "that I shall esteem it a great favor if he will honor us with his presence for—how long?"

"We-ell," said Betty weightily, "you can't very well ask him for less than three days, can you? Suppose you invite him from Friday to Monday."

"Very well."

"And then if you wanted him to stay longer you could ask him, could n't you?"

"I might. You don't think he'd be insulted?"

"I think you're getting to be a good deal of a goose," laughed Betty, jumping up from the bench. "That's settled, then, is n't it?"

"That I'm a—er—an anatoid web-footed person?"

"What? Oh, a goose? No, I mean about Mr. Craigie. The other must have been settled—how old are you, Richard?"

"I'm a mere child of twenty-eight, Betty."

Betty turned and surveyed him questioningly, a little puzzled frown on her white forehead. "What is the matter with you to-day?" she asked. "You—you're downright flippant!"

"Why not? Is n't to-morrow a holiday?" he asked, with a sober countenance. Betty frowned.

"If you talk like that, I won't go at all! You're supposed to miss me horribly; you said you would."

"I did n't say horribly; I said naturally."

"And you're not to take a holiday to-morrow, Richard; you're to work hard all day long, so you can drive to Stockton and get us the next day, when we return."

"You're not going to stay overnight!"

"Of course, silly! How much shopping do you suppose I can do in one afternoon? Why, there'll be fittings! Of course we'll have to

stay overnight; and go to the theatre and have supper afterwards. You—you don't think you want to change your mind and come, Richard?"

"Thanks, but I think I'll be more comfortable here."

"Richard, did you say twenty-eight or fifty-eight?" she asked sweetly.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Don't you ever let yourself go?"

"Let myself go?"

"Yes, have a good time; just be foolish and—and not care. Have n't you ever done anything you were sorry for afterwards?"

"Lots of things, naturally."

"Oh, I don't mean make a grammatical error! I mean, have you never done anything—reckless, foolish, wicked?"

"My dear Betty—"

"I know!" She sighed. "You never have. You need n't tell me. Well, don't you think it would be absolutely silly for you to go to Boston with us to-morrow?"

"It would be a waste of two days of work—"

"Then, why not do it? Why not waste two days, Richard? Think how nice and guilty you'd feel, how ashamed! Will you?"

"I don't think I care to feel guilty and ashamed," he answered, with a smile. "Perhaps the sensation might prove as delightful as you infer, but unfortunately I am engaged on a piece of work that must be completed by the first of September; and as it is now the middle of June—"

"Oh, bother your book! Richard, what would happen if it was n't done on time?"

"Why—er—I suppose the earth would spin around much the same as usual, only—"

"Only, you're afraid to risk it. I know. Now come and take me to walk."

"Walk! Good Lord, Betty! After three sets of tennis?"

"Please! You ought to be very nice to me to-day, Richard. Just think how you'll miss me to-morrow. You *will* miss me, won't you?"

"I shall be inconsolable, Betty."

"Well, I shall miss you," she replied sadly, as they moved across the lawn. "I—I wish you'd come along."

"Oh, you won't need me," he laughed. "You'll have Tom Craigie, you know."

"What of it? Don't you suppose a girl can put up with more than one man at a time, Richard? Besides, you're heaps better looking than Mr. Craigie."

"I thank you," replied Richard gravely.

"You really are, you know. You have such a be-oo-tiful romantic nose, and your eyes are—are nice, and you have such a lovely strong chin. The only thing I don't—quite—like—is your mustache."

"I shall shave it off to-morrow," he laughed.

"N-no, I should n't do that. Maybe you would n't look so well without any at all. But—but could n't you let it grow a little longer, Richard, and sort of twist it up at the ends—like this?" And she twirled her fingers above a corner of her laughing mouth and frowned ferociously.

"I'll see what can be done with it," he answered meekly. "But I fear it has been kept short for so long that it is discouraged by this time, has lost ambition." He swung open the gate in the hedge and they emerged on the dusty road. "Has—er—Tom that sort of a mustache?"

"I don't remember. Richard, there's no use in your trying to tease me about Mr. Craigie." After a moment she added, "At least, not yet."

"Oh!" Richard frowned at the dusty bushes beside the way for a minute. Then, "Look here, Betty, I hope you won't—er—let anything occur between you and Tom Craigie while your folks are away."

"What sort of anything?" asked Betty, her eyes dancing.

"Why, I mean—an engagement. It would n't be quite the thing, you know."

"Would n't it?" she asked demurely.

"It certainly would not," he replied shortly. "Besides, as you are under my charge—"

"Richard, you're not jealous, are you? You—you don't want to marry me yourself, do you?"

"Good Lord, no!" he ejaculated.

Betty's laugh rang delightedly. "But—but you need n't bite my head off," she gasped. "Besides, it would n't be such a bad thing, you know, Richard. I'll have a—well, a good deal of money."

"Which Tom needs a good deal more than I do," he returned dryly.

"That is distinctly unkind! You infer that he wants me for my money, and that I have no other charms. You insult us both."

"And you inferred that I might consider your wealth in marrying you."

"Did I? Well, then, honors are even. Let's sit down. I'm tired."

"Sit down? Where?" asked Richard, viewing the empty road.

"On the stone wall, of course," she replied, suiting action to word. "I love a stone wall; it's so uncomfortable. There, is n't this nice? Now we can talk. I ought to be frightfully cast-down, ought n't I?"

"Should you?"

"Of course! Have you forgotten that you just refused me? I have never been refused before, Richard."

"Perhaps you never proposed before," he replied smilingly.

"No, I never did. I knew you were safe, Richard."

"H'm! You'd have been much surprised if I'd accepted you."

"Yes, but"—she turned and examined him with frank curiosity—"I should n't have been bluffed! Do you know, Richard, I dare say that, with proper training, you'd make a very nice husband?"

"Really?" he asked amusedly. "And what sort of training would you suggest?"

"Well, first I'd have to teach you to laugh."

"Is that a necessary accomplishment in a husband?"

"It would be in mine," responded Betty, nodding vigorously. "You see, Richard, I'd be so—so trying at times, that if you did n't laugh easily you'd swear; and laughing is so much nicer. There is n't really anything that can't be laughed at if you know how."

Betty was silent a moment. Then,

"Richard," she asked dreamily, "were you ever in love?"

"I believe not."

"Really? Or are you just fibbing? I have."

Richard smiled. "Are you referring to your present infatuation?" he asked.

She made a face at him. "I am not. I've had lots and lots of love affairs—perfectly desperate, some of them! Why, once, when I was about twelve, I almost eloped!"

"Really? And what—er—prevented?"

"The boy's parents heard of it and spanked him." Betty sighed. "I was heart-broken for a while. Then I fell in love with another boy who was lots older than I. That was an unrequited passion. He never knew of it. And then—oh, then there were lots of affairs, Richard!"

"What the dickens were your parents doing all this time?" he inquired frowningly.

"I don't think they knew about it," said Betty. "Now tell me about you, Richard."

"I'm afraid I have nothing to tell. I have a dim recollection of once sending a valentine to a young lady. She thought it sent by another boy, and so nothing came of it."

"Is that all?" Betty protested. "Why, Richard, what *have* you been doing all these years?"

"Just waiting for you, I fancy," he chaffed.

"Waiting for me!" she said indignantly. "Why, you've just refused me!"

"It was so sudden," he laughed. "Give me time to think it over. Possibly during your absence—"

Betty slid down from the wall. "No." She shook her head firmly. "You've had your chance. I must find some one else, I suppose."

"When you consider that I was never proposed to before," he complained, "you ought, I think, to excuse a natural—er—heisitancy."

"Hesitancy!" laughed Betty. "There was n't any! You—you absolutely exploded a refusal! It—was n't flattering. I wish to go home now, please, and hide my diminished head."

"I hope," he said presently, as they strolled back, "you won't marry Tom Craigie to-morrow out of pique."

Betty tossed her head. "I shall promise nothing," she declared.

CHAPTER XII.

"I'm so glad," said Aunt Letitia the next morning, when, with the carriage at the door, she waited for Betty to come down, "that you've invited Mr. Craigie, Richard."

"That *I* have!"

"Why, yes; you have, have n't you? I mean, you are going to. Betty said—"

"I suppose," replied Richard thoughtfully, "I could claim undue coercion, or whatever the legal phrase is, but I fancy it is hardly worth while."

"What *are* you talking about, my dear? I was speaking of Mr. Craigie. Betty says you want me to ask him out here for a week-end."

"It is the dearest wish of my life," he responded gravely.

The carriage rolled away at a little after eight, Betty waving farewell all the length of the drive. Later, when Richard retired to the study and seated himself at his desk, a great and marvellous silence was settled over the house. Assuring himself that to-day, at least, he would be able to make progress, he lighted his pipe, drew his manuscript to him, and ran through his notes. Presently he selected a soberly-bound volume from the rack beside him and opened it where a marker lay. Then he relighted his pipe. Finally he pushed his notes away and leaned back in his chair, his hands behind his head, and puffed big clouds of gray smoke toward the ceiling. Time passed. He aroused himself suddenly with a scowl and leaned over the book once more. In the act of turning a page, his eyes wandered to a window, and he saw that the weather had grown cloudy. He hoped it would n't rain. Of course they could take a carriage and do their shopping, but he fancied it would be rather unpleasant. He glanced at the desk clock. Why, they were half-way there by now! Good Lord! Where had the time gone? Nearly eleven, and he had n't touched pen to paper! Resolutely he laid aside his pipe, and frowned absently at the virgin sheet of paper. At last he wrote half a dozen lines.

After all, even should it rain here, the weather might be quite fair in Boston—he found his mind once more astray—and doubtless Betty

would display enough sense to purchase a pair of practical shoes, and not go running around over wet sidewalks in those absurd, paper-soled pumps. And in any case it was not his place to worry!

He relighted his pipe. What was the matter with the place to-day? The silence was uncanny! It—it got on his nerves! He tossed down his pen and walked to the hearth, and there, his back to the fireplace, frowned at the gray world while the desk clock ticked off the precious minutes.

Later he returned to work, and, having read what he had written, scrunched the sheet up disgustedly and tossed it away. What absolute drivel! And then, while he was still striving for a fresh start, a far-off chiming announced that it was luncheon-time!

The rain came just as he had seated himself at the table—a slow, soft, persistent drizzle that blotted out the world beyond the garden hedge. With some thought of making up for another wasted forenoon, he returned to the study after his solitary luncheon, and dipped his pen again. But after staring at an empty sheet of paper for a quarter of an hour he pushed back his chair and strode to the porch door. The garden looked forlorn. The flowers, drenched with moisture, hung their heads abjectly, sprawling across the sodden paths. The porch held pools of water. There was no temptation in that direction. For an hour he mooned about the library, rearranging some books, trying to read. But the light, save at the windows, was dim, and the books failed to hold him. At four, donning a rain-coat and a woollen cap, and seizing his heaviest stick, he splashed off down the driveway and spent an hour tramping over the wet, soppy countryside.

Dinner was a dreary meal, and the copy of the review which he tried to prop open beside him had the very devil in it and flopped its pages shut every time he took his eyes off it. After coffee he went to the piano and tried to pick out the tune of a song Betty had sung the night of her arrival. Failing in that, he strove to recall some of the songs he had sung at college. In the middle of one of them Maggie appeared on the scene, looking vastly concerned, to ask if he had called her, and he stopped in disgust. Having finished his one cigar, he deliberately lighted a second. That lasted him until he could with decency ascend to his room, and with the soft patter of the rain in his ears he at last fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

“CURRAN, I want you to drive over and meet the eleven-forty train from Boston,” directed Richard the next morning. “Miss Dallen and Miss Lee will be on it.”

This was at nine o’clock.

“She should n’t expect me to sacrifice a whole morning’s work in

order to meet her at Stockton. Curran will do quite as well, Besides, she's capable of bringing Tom back with her to-day, and I'm blessed if I'll drive away over there to welcome that idiot!"

This was at ten o'clock.

And then, at two and a half minutes past eleven, he hurried to the push-button in a panic and summoned a maid. "Has Curran gone yet, Maggie?" he demanded.

"No, sir; he's harnessing."

"Tell him—tell him I have decided to drive to the station myself."

The train was nearly twenty minutes late, and Richard, alternately soothing the chestnut cob and puffing at his pipe, scorned himself for his weakness and wished himself at home. When at last the long train drew wearily into the station, he almost hoped that Betty and Aunt Letitia were not on it. But they were; at least, Aunt Letitia had arrived, but Betty was not visible. It was only when she was laughing at him across the wheel that he awoke to the fact that the radiant young person in a suit of white ratine and a braided straw turban with a pert cockade of Natier blue in front was Betty.

"Richard, we've got dozens of bags and bundles! Do you think we can get them all in?" She was already handing them to him, and while he was piling the floor in front with them Aunt Letitia arrived with more.

"Why, Richard!" she exclaimed. "How nice of you to meet us! Is anything the matter with Curran?"

"Nothing aside from his usual laziness," he replied. "I'd be glad to get out and assist you, but if I did this animal would bolt. I can take a few more bundles in front here. I hope you had a successful trip."

"We had the time of our lives!" declared Betty. "Did n't we, Aunt Letitia? And just wait, Richard, until you see the gowns I've bought!"

"I fancy I'm seeing one of them now," he answered, searching the platform apprehensively for Tom Craigie.

"Oh, this! Do you like it? It was ridiculously cheap, was n't it, Aunt Letitia? But *do* you like my hat? Don't you think it's *sweet*? He *will* like my big one, won't he, Aunt Letitia?"

Richard condescendingly approved of the turban, and the cob waltzed his way out of the village. Betty was voluble all the way home, but as the horse demanded a good deal of attention much of her narrative was lost to Richard. In the hall, while Curran was transferring bags and parcels to the maids, Betty held out a pair of white-gloved hands to Richard.

"You have n't once said you were glad to have us back," she challenged.

Richard took the hands gingerly. "Is it necessary to say it?" he asked.

Betty nodded emphatically, swinging their clasped hands back and forth happily. "Very, when you don't even look it! And, Richard, I have n't told you!"

"What?" he asked, conscious of Aunt Letitia's interested regard as she directed the disposal of the luggage.

"He's coming!" Betty swung the hands wide. "On Friday!" The hands swung back again. "To stay until Monday! Is n't that dandy?" Betty gave his fingers an ecstatic squeeze.

"Very nice," he replied, really trying to reflect some of her pleasure as he rescued his hands. "I suppose you mean Tom Craigie?"

"Of course. And I am to telephone him whether it is all right about the stable, Richard."

"The stable? I *had* thought of putting him up in the house."

"Silly! The car, of course! I told him I thought there would be plenty of room for it. There is, is n't there?"

"Good Lord! Is he bringing that thing here?"

"Don't you want him to? I thought it would be jolly to go around and see some of the places, Richard. Why, we could go over to Lenox for luncheon and—and see everything! Don't you *really* want him to bring his car?"

"I don't care what he does; only, I don't see where he's going to keep it."

"Is n't there room in the stable? Would it hurt if one of the carriages stood outside, Richard, just for two or three days? Of course, if it would——"

"Not at all. Tell him to bring it along, and we'll do the best we can for him."

"You're a duck!" declared Betty. "Now I'm going up to primp. Don't go away; I've got lots to say yet. Why, it seems as though I had n't seen you for weeks, Richard!"

At luncheon Betty was again transformed. A cream-white serge skirt with a tiny black stripe, a waist of white voile, hand-embroidered and tucked, white stocking and shoes, a white leather belt. She laughed enjoyably at Richard's look of bewilderment, and dropped him a courtesy at the doorway.

"Well?" she asked.

"It's rather breath-taking," he acknowledged. "When—er—when do you change again? I want to be prepared."

"Not until dinner-time. Still, if any one should drop in for afternoon tea, I have a perfect dream of a gown I could get into. I wish you could have seen me trying on yesterday evening, Richard——"

"My dear!" murmured Aunt Letitia.

"Oh, well, you know what I mean. I wish you could have been in the next room and seen the perfect procession of errand girls and fitters! There were dozens! Did n't we have a perfectly gorgeous time, Aunt Letitia?"

"It was quite exciting, dear."

"Exciting! It was just like a wedding! We did n't have time to go downstairs for dinner, Richard; we ate it in our parlor between fits."

"Between—"

"I mean fittings. The stores were very accommodating. And, oh, Richard, before I forget it, I owe Aunt Letitia forty-two dollars."

"You mean that you spent the five hundred?"

"Like that—pouf! It did n't last any time, my dear man. Things are frightfully high at this season. Why, what do you suppose I paid for this waist, Richard? And you can see it's the simplest sort of a thing."

"I have n't the least idea, Betty."

"Oh, well, give a guess! You must know *something* about the prices of things."

"Ah—ten—no, twelve dollars?"

"Richard!" she exclaimed reproachfully. "Why, look at all these dear, tiny little tucks! Eighteen dollars, Richard! Is n't that perfectly absurd? I really needed half a dozen, but at that price I simply could n't afford more than three. One of the others is real sweet—it cost twenty-two, I think. I've got the dreamiest evening gown, Richard! It's a model, and I think it was absurdly cheap at a hundred and forty, don't you, Aunt Letitia?"

"I'm sure it was, my dear. But do eat luncheon now. Richard would much rather see your things than hear about them, I'm sure."

"Oh, but Richard is just frightfully interested, are n't you? He's interested in anything and everything that concerns his dear, darling, bestest cousin, Aunt Letitia. He's a ducky-Dick, that's what he is!" She paused and there was a ripple of laughter. "That's it!" she exclaimed. "After this I shall call you Dick!"

Aunt Letitia looked fairly horrified. Richard smiled.

"If you do, I'll call you Bett!"

"I'd love it! Betty is so—so *infantile*, is n't it?"

"But Bett!" expostulated Aunt Letitia distastefully.

"I like it, Aunt Letitia. Richard—I mean Dick—I shall be your one best Bett! Now, please, may I have another croquette?"

So much dissipation proved too much for Aunt Letitia, and Richard and Betty ate dinner without her. Afterwards there was coffee on the porch, since, although yesterday's rain had cooled the morning air, the evening had brought heat and sultriness. There was a lopsided moon

above the hills across the valley, and when Richard had set down his cup Betty was on her feet.

"Let's go outdoors," she said imperatively. "Don't you love moonlight?"

"H'm; is n't it a bit risky in that dress?"

Betty viewed the light-blue dinner-gown she wore and shook her head. "It's quite warm; besides, I'll get a scarf. You must put your cap on, though. I'll bring it to you."

When she returned they stepped on to the lawn and passed around the front of the house.

"Where are we going?" Richard asked.

"To the garden. A garden is the only place to be on a night like this—unless it's on the water."

"I never heard of a garden on the water," he remarked.

"I did n't say—— Well, perhaps I did. But what can you expect, Richard—no, Dick—when I have n't had a chance yet to read your new book?"

They went along the curving path, every step bringing a new vista of black shadows and silvery radiance. The flowers, under the moonlight, had a new beauty. Not a breath stirred through the garden. A group of white iris blooms stood out against a background of dark bronze-green like flower ghosts. And over all in the still, humid air a hundred perfumes floated, mingling and separating like incense from a thousand thuribles. The fauns leered eerily from their tall shafts, the moonlight throwing their features into sharp relief against the gloom of the shrubbery beyond.

"They're laughing at us," whispered Betty, pausing at the end of the path and laying a light hand on Richard's sleeve.

"They've caught it from you," he answered. "They never laughed before you came."

"Did you?" she asked, leading the way to the gleaming white seat. He settled himself beside her before he answered. Then,

"Have you changed me too?" he asked.

She nodded, her hands clasped about one knee and her eyes staring straight up at the big white moon. "Yes," she said; "a little. I mean to more. You're better already, but you have n't learned to really laugh yet; you chuckle."

"And when I've learned to laugh, is my education over?"

"Just beginning," she replied, still staring the moon out of countenance. "When you have learned to laugh you will learn to be happy, but that comes quite easily."

"But I am happy now," he answered amusedly, his eyes on the soft profile of her upturned face. "Quite happy," he added with a sigh.

"But that," she said, "is because I am here."

"Oh!"

She laughed very softly, and, leaning back against the seat, regarded him smilingly. "It is true, though. I make you laugh, and when you laugh you open your mouth and the joys pop inside and suddenly you're feeling quite happy and light-hearted."

"Or light-headed," he suggested.

She took no notice of that. "The trouble is now, Richard, that you don't really laugh well, and when you don't laugh well you don't open your mouth wide enough for the great big joys to get in. It's only the little, thin, wispy joys that can enter, you see."

"I think I have met some folks who were happy, Betty, and yet did n't laugh much."

"There are people like that," she acknowledged. "Do you know why they're happy? Because they sleep with their mouths open, Richard, and the joys get in at night!"

"You absurd girl!" he laughed.

"I am a silly, ain't I?" she agreed. Then, with a deep sigh, "Do you suppose I'll ever get any sense, Cousin?" she asked seriously.

"I hope not, if it is going to make you different, Betty."

"Richard, you're positively splendid to-night! I think it's the moon. Would n't you like me better, though, if I—oh, if I were more clever and dignified and—and serious?"

"Then, you would n't be—Betty," he laughed.

"Who should I be?"

"Perhaps Elizabeth. Surely not Bett."

"I should n't want to be Elizabeth," she mused. "It sounds too grand and haughty. I'd never be able to live up to it. Fancy having a real good laugh at something and hearing some one ask, 'Who is that laughing?' and some one else say, 'That's Elizabeth Lee!' Would n't you just want to sink through the floor for shame? When I was a wee tot I used rather to like Elizabeth. Then I played that I was a duchess or a countess or something, and that my name was Lady Elizabeth—Lady Elizabeth Lee. It sounds rather swell, does n't it?"

"Very, but I think I know a better title than that; surely one which fits you better."

"Really? Is it nice? What is it?"

"Lady Laughter," he answered.

"Oh, but that sounds as if laughing were the only thing I did!"

"Well, it's one of the things you do best."

"Now you're being horrid," she mourned. "I'll never laugh again!"

"I hope you will. Shall I tell you something? Yesterday I made the remarkable discovery that I could n't write because—why, do you suppose?"

"You had no ink?"

"Because I missed your laughter, Betty!"

"Richard!" She sprang to her feet and faced him in consternation. "Come into the house immediately! The moon's doing perfectly awful things to you! The first thing you know you'll be making love to me!"

He produced his case and deliberately chose a second cigar.

"I might even do that," he replied with a suggestion of swagger as he arose.

CHAPTER XIV.

DURING the next few days Curran made periodical trips to Stockton and brought back oblong pasteboard boxes of various sizes, and Betty and Aunt Letitia, assisted by Sophie, spent much time in secret session above-stairs. And every so often Richard was called upon to view and admire, and in the course of time became able to distinguish chiffon broadcloth from charmeuse, and a revers from a guimpe.

About this time a cable message reached Betty from London. She showed it to Richard directly she had read it.

Trunks shipped express to-day. Both well. Writing. Love. FATHER.

"H'm," Richard commented. "It's difficult to discern from this whether your father is still angry or has become reconciled."

"Oh, reconciled," said Betty. "Why, that's quite an affectionate message from Papa! It's all right now. You'll see. I do wish, though, I knew whether they've sent Higgins to visit the Higginses!"

After dinner that evening, Betty, who was reading the *New York Times* and sipping a cup of sugar melted in coffee, suddenly exclaimed, "So that's where they are!"

"And who might they be?" asked Aunt Letitia.

"The Bradfords. They're at Magnolia. They've taken a cottage. I remember that Nancy said last year they thought of trying Magnolia next. You see, they've tried almost every other place. Well, the things I've bought will do very well until my trunks come, won't they? Is Magnolia very dressy?"

"Then, you think of visiting these friends of yours?" asked Aunt Letitia.

"Oh, of course. I can't stay here all summer, you dear thing. I only invited myself for a fortnight, and that will soon be up. I must write Nancy to-morrow. Please, somebody, help me to remember."

Aunt Letitia shot an inquiring glance at Richard. He was thoughtfully watching a cloud of smoke writhe through the window. The weather had turned cooler, and they had had their coffee in the drawing-room.

"I'm sure, Betty," said Aunt Letitia finally, receiving no assistance from her nephew—"I'm sure we'd be very glad to have you stay here as long as you can stand us. Certainly, we can't equal the North Shore for gaiety, but if you don't mind our humdrum ways, dear—"

"Of course Betty's tiring of them, Aunt," said Richard stiffly. "I, for one, don't blame her."

"That's a mean, horrid thing to say, Richard! I just love it here, and you know it, but I don't intend to sponge all summer on you!"

"Not when you can have the gaiety of Magnolia, evidently," he replied.

Betty flushed, opened her mouth to speak, caught back the first word on the tip of her tongue, and finished her sugar and coffee. Then she arose quietly and passed into the hall.

"You should n't have hurt her feelings so, Richard," said Aunt Letitia troubledly. "After all, it's not to be wondered at that she should prefer a—a gayer place, my dear."

"That is only what I observed," replied Richard coldly. "So why should she take offense?"

"But—the way you said it, Richard, was n't—" She paused. The screen door at the front of the house slammed gently. "I wonder if she has put anything on."

Richard made no answer. But, after a minute or two,

"Tom Craigie comes to-morrow, does n't he?" he asked indifferently.

"Yes, some time in the afternoon. He said it would depend on the road."

"I wish he'd lose it!" muttered Richard.

"It's only for three days," replied his aunt soothingly.

"Three days! Do you suppose he intends to remain but three days, my dear Aunt? If we get rid of him by August, we'll be doing well!"

"But if he is not invited to remain, Richard, why, surely—"

"But he will be! That's just it! I'll invite him or you'll invite him, and neither of us will ever know how nor why we did it! I have half a mind to pack a bag and go away for a week."

"And leave your work?"

"No, I'd take it with me. That's the point. I'd like to go somewhere where I could write in peace."

"Has n't it been going well?" ventured Aunt Letitia sympathetically.

"It has scarcely been going at all," he replied. "And with Tom Craigie honking his automobile around the place and telling his silly stories—"

"I'm sure, dear, he will keep away from your study during your working hours."

"He'd better! But that is n't it. It—it's the—the consciousness of having strangers around me that disturbs me, Aunt Letitia."

"I'm sorry, Richard. I suppose you did n't realize that when you invited him."

"If you care to put it that way," he replied dryly, "I did n't."

Ten minutes later he finished his cigar, arose, frowned over some music on the top of the piano, and presently strode from the room. Aunt Letitia listened. A screen door closed with a vicious *bang*. Aunt Letitia nodded and went on with her embroidering.

CHAPTER XV.

THERE was a chill in the air to-night, and only once or twice had the moon peered out from behind the clouds. It was in hiding when Richard stepped out on the path which led along the front of the house. He had swung a coat over his arm and donned a cap. He felt certain that he would find Betty in the garden, and so he passed through the white gate and looked about through the half-darkness. He was on the point of calling to her when a blur of lighter tone took shape against the shadows of the study porch. She was seated on the edge of the porch, leaning against a column. He walked across to her in silence.

"Aunt Letitia is afraid you will catch cold," he announced as he stood over her and held out the coat. "You had better put this on."

"I am quite warm, thank you," she replied in tones matching his in chilly politeness. Nevertheless, she accepted the coat, and slipped it over her shoulders. Having performed his ostensible errand, there seemed no reason for lingering. On the other hand, to retreat gracefully seemed even more difficult. He thought of dropping some caution against remaining out too long, and then stepping across the porch and into the dimly lighted study. Fortunately, however, he remembered in time that the porch door was locked from the inside. To go back the way he had come, leaving her alone out there in the darkness, seemed indefensible. Besides, he really wanted to render an apology for his churlishness. The silence lengthened. Richard remained standing in the path, awkward and dumb. Once he thought she turned her head and looked up at him, but it was too dark to be certain of that. A dozen remarks suggested themselves and were repulsed as inane. Of course, it was perfectly feasible to ask her pardon in so many words and retire with dignity, but some demon of perversity ruled him to-night. At last,

"Won't you sit down?" she asked, sweetly polite.

"No, thank you. I'm going right back," he replied stiffly.

Silence settled down again. The moon crept out from under a pile of purple-black clouds, bathed the world in silver light for a moment,

and was again obscured. Suddenly little stifled sounds came to him from the figure on the porch, sounds which Richard, with a quick, dismayed softening of his mood, told himself were sobs. She was crying! What a brute had been! Impulsively he reached down and laid a hand on her shoulder. He could feel it shake under the rough surface of the coat. The sounds, as though defying restraint, became louder.

"Betty!" he said softly. "Please!"

Then his hand fell from the shoulder, and he stepped back, surprised, suspicious. Was it possible that—that—

It was! Richard turned on his heel, and walked down the path and through the gate. And as he passed the corner of the house the sound of laughter, bubbling, merry, and unrestrained, fell upon his outraged ears!

The next morning you would have thought, from Betty's attitude, that nothing at all had happened. Such a well-behaved Betty! Prompt to the minute at breakfast! So attentive to Aunt Letitia's wants! So concerned about Richard's appetite, which was not of the best this morning! In short, so angelic that Aunt Letitia openly beamed upon her and secretly wondered, while Richard, nursing his wounded dignity, repelled all her advances with polite hauteur.

"Mr. Craigie will have a splendid day for his trip," observed Aunt Letitia.

"Won't he!" agreed Betty. "It's a perfectly wonderful morning! The air's like—like—what is it you liken air to, Richard, when you want to say something nice about it?"

"I really can't say."

"Well, whatever it is, it's just like it," continued Betty, undeterred. "I've been in the garden with Curran. Curran says we are going to have a very warm summer. He told me how he knew, but I forgot; something about snails or slugs, I think. And I picked the darlingest bunch of flowers for your study, Richard."

"Thank you, but you should n't have bothered."

"Oh, but I love to pick flowers. Curran says I should cut them, but I did n't have anything to cut them with, you see. He tried very hard to be cross, but I would n't let him. Curran's a funny old dear, is n't he?"

After breakfast, when Richard, having glanced through a paper, started toward the study, Betty intervened.

"You're not going to work yet, are you?" she asked. "Why, it's only a little after nine."

"It will be half-past before I get started," he answered.

"Well—but—could n't you come out just a minute? Curran is going to mark the tennis-court. Let's go and see him do it."

"He will do it very well without my assistance."

"Please! Just a minute, just ten minutes!"

"Really, Betty, I thought you understood by this time that the morning is my time to work. Now, please, don't ask again."

"You're still angry, are n't you?" she asked, studying his face with anxious eyes. "Richard, I'm sorry I laughed."

"It's of no consequence," he replied indifferently.

"I—I did n't mean to hurt your feelings, really! But—but it was so funny, you standing there and not saying anything, and I sitting there and not saying anything—"

"It was undoubtedly a very humorous situation," he returned dryly. "Unfortunately, my sense of humor is—er—apparently deficient."

A smile stole into her eyes as he turned away. "I should n't say *apparently*, Richard," she answered.

His first act when the door closed behind him was resolutely to seize upon a vase of pink roses which adorned his desk and transfer it to the distant mantel. After that he stood for quite five minutes and glowered at the offending blossoms. Then he seated himself at the desk, arranged his work before him, dipped his pen in ink, and addressed the clock sternly:

"She's in such good spirits because he is coming this afternoon," he muttered.

For some unaccountable reason, he performed an excellent morning's work.

Tom Craigie rolled up the drive at four o'clock in a big gray touring-car, with a nerve-racking shriek of an electric horn. As Richard shook hands with him, he wondered at the difficulty he experienced in making his "Hello, Tom! Glad to see you!" sound sincere. They had been friends ever since their second year in preparatory school, and Richard had always been genuinely fond of Tom, even though he disapproved of the other's frivolity and lack of earnestness. But now he realized that he was dimly resenting Tom's advent; resenting, too, the fervor of the welcome accorded him by the others. It was as though a thin film of ice had coated the old friendliness. As Curran saw to Tom's kit-bag and the new-comer responded gaily to the ladies' questions, Richard found himself viewing his friend with a new interest, an interest at once critical and slightly hostile. Good-looking Tom certainly was. Not quite as tall as Richard, a little broader, a little "better-fed," to use a convenient phrase, he looked also less hard and well-conditioned. Clean-shaven, boyish, merry, with laughing gray eyes and a flexible mouth, Tom induced smiles without an effort. He wore a suit of gray flannel, a soft, pleated shirt of lavender, and a tie of a darker shade of the same color. In spite of a long and, doubtless, dusty journey, he looked as spick and span as a drum-major, and not a fleck of dirt marred the clear sunburned face.

"He stopped somewhere, probably in Stockton," mused Richard, "and cleaned up. He always has the ladies in mind."

The two men, followed by Curran with the kit-bag, went up to Tom's room. Tom tossed a dust-coat and a pair of goggles on to the bed and turned enthusiastically to his host as Curran closed the door behind him.

"Richard, you lucky dog, she's a stunner!" he exclaimed. "Good heavens, man, why did you never tell me you had a cousin like that? Think of the years I've been wasting, eh!"

"Not wasting, Tom," replied Richard. "Or, at least, you've not been quite idle."

"The things you allude to, Richard, are gone, forgotten; they never were! And I stick to wasted. Honest, old man, she's the nicest girl I ever met. And dance—good Lord! Well, how are you, any way? Looking a bit ragged, are n't you? By Jove, I'm glad to be here, old Sobersides!"

"Did you have a good run?"

"Fair. Had a flat tire near Springfield and lost twenty-five minutes. Made up for it, though, afterwards. That new State Road is a wonder. I did fifty right along between towns. Awful lot of towns, though. Ought to be a law against having 'em so thick."

"Mention it to Jim Stokes," Richard laughed. "Jim's always looking for bills to introduce."

"I believe I will. It would n't be half as funny as some of the freak things he's fathered. Throw me a clean shirt, will you? Any one will do; let's have the green and yellow; that's sort of classy—what? Want to take a ride after a while? It's a bully old day."

"Not for me, thanks. Perhaps the ladies would like to go. I've got some letters to write before dinner."

"Oh, to the deuce with your old letters, Richard! Let me tell you something, feller: while I'm here, no letters, no work, no—no nothing! Get me?"

"I can't promise all that, Tom," answered Richard, with a smile. "You go ahead and enjoy yourself, and I'll cut in when I can. I'm away behind on my work, and I'll have to beg off now and then."

"Eh?" Tom viewed his friend with a look of appraisement. "What's the trouble, old man?"

"None that I'm aware of, Tom."

"M'm; you look sort of—sort of grumpy. Look here, I have n't butted in, have I?"

"Of course not."

"Well, all right. If I have, you know, if I'm trespassing, why, tip me the wink, and I'll beat it. Now let's go down and start something."

Richard saw the others off in the car a half-hour later, and then roamed into the library, feeling strangely out of sorts. He selected a book from a shelf, examined it inside and out absent-mindedly, and jammed it back into place. In Heaven's name, he asked himself, why had he elected to remain at home? Why should n't he have joined the party? Of course, there were letters to write—there always were; but none demanded immediate attention. He suddenly realized that ever since yesterday evening he had been behaving like a sulky child. There was nothing decidedly wrong with him. Perhaps Aunt Letitia was right, and he did need a change. If he did n't feel more—er—rational to-morrow, he would run away for a week. Having reached that conclusion, he shut himself in the study and wrote two notes of small importance, subsequently perching them ostentatiously on top of the mail-box in the hall instead of in it, that the others might see that his excuse had been valid.

Betty appeared for dinner that evening in a new gown, a turquoise creation of velveteen and chiffon that was eminently becoming. Richard had never seen her look quite as she did to-night. She had swathed the mass of her red-brown hair about her small head in smooth swirls that added a new piquancy to the adorable face beneath, and, it seemed, a new sparkle to the violet eyes. Her voice too, her laugh that was like the throaty gurgle of a silver stream over golden pebbles, held, to Richard's ears at least, a little note of triumph that was strange to him. Tom Craigie paid his court openly, honestly, assiduously. The repast went merrily. Richard, dimly conscious of a novel excitement within him, an excitement not fairly attributable to the one glass of wine he consumed, forgot to be sulky or pedantic. Tom had a budget of new stories which he told well and without dragging them in, Aunt Letitia, looking absurdly young, laughed and bantered frivolously, and Betty—well, Betty was more Betty than ever!

After coffee they played rum until Aunt Letitia had lost her fortune of red, white, and blue chips. Then Betty went to the piano, and Tom, never more than a yard away, hung over her. Richard, recalling that Tom had been on the Glee Club in college, demanded a song, and Betty pulled over the music until she found something they could agree on. After that Tom was the star until, sated, Betty induced Aunt Letitia to play dance music. Then the rugs were kicked helter-skelter aside, and Tom and Betty, and subsequently Richard and Betty, waltzed and two-stepped and one-stepped until, flushed and breathless, they were forced to seek the coolness of the porch.

The next day, Richard virtuously refusing to be beguiled from duty, the others went off in the forenoon in the car, "to see the world and grab a bite of luncheon at Lenox," as Tom put it. Richard had difficulty in getting settled down to work, but when the morning was half gone

made a good start, and really accomplished a satisfactory stint by the time he was summoned to his solitary repast. The travellers came back, dusty, fagged, and happy, just in time to dress for dinner. Richard, from the conscious rectitude of the stay-at-home who has the knowledge of duty performed to support him, viewed them tolerantly as they descended from the car, and expressed the hope that they had enjoyed themselves.

"Oh, we had a perfectly dandy time!" declared Betty. "But I do wish you had gone along, Richard."

"Really?" he asked, a note of eagerness mingling with his assumed carelessness.

"Yes, I hate to sit in the back. And if you had been with us, I could have sat with Mr. Craigie in front."

"I see. I'm sorry I did n't think of that," he replied dryly. "Of course, you might have bounced Aunt Letitia out if you had thought of it—"

Betty reached up and pulled Richard's head down until she could whisper. Then, "Do you know, I believe Mr. Craigie did think of that?" she confided. "But he did n't do it. Was n't that considerate of him?"

"And of Aunt Letitia," he laughed. "If you're going to dress for dinner," he continued as the others entered, "you'd better start along."

"We're not," said Betty. "Nobody's going to. Aunt Letitia said we need n't. And after dinner we're going over to Great Barrington to the circus."

"To the circus! What—what for?"

"To see the elephants and the camels and the clowns, and to eat peanuts," responded Betty promptly. "We're all going." She added this with decision, noting Richard's lack of enthusiasm.

"Well," answered Richard meanly, "I'll go if I don't have to sit on the back seat. I can't stand that. It makes me—er—car-sick."

"Why—ah—I don't believe you'd mind the back of my car," began Tom rather blankly. But Betty interrupted.

"He's only teasing, Tom. He *hates* front seats—don't you, Richard?"

And Betty looked so imploring that, in spite of the fact that he disapproved of the sudden intimacy exemplified by the use of Tom's first name by Betty, he yielded and declared that while sitting in the tonneau made him car-sick, sitting in front made him dizzy, and he preferred the former sensation to the latter.

"Besides," said Betty approvingly, "you can go to sleep coming home if you want. Now I'm going to get the dust off. We'll have to have dinner early, won't we, Aunt Letitia? I don't want to miss a bit of it!"

There was no doubt that Betty enjoyed the entertainment. There was no doubt that Tom enjoyed being with Betty. As for Aunt Letitia and Richard, the former, after unsuccessfully trying to back out of the expedition at the last moment, bore it philosophically, while the latter also bore up as bravely as possible. They stopped afterwards for supper at a hotel, and went back to The Hermitage under the glare of a decrepit moon and through the fragrant sweetness of the summer night. On the front seat Betty and Tom chattered gaily. In the tonneau Aunt Letitia napped discreetly, and Richard stared moodily at the moon.

CHAPTER XVI.

TOM remained until the following Wednesday. Then he reluctantly tore himself away and disappeared in a cloud of dust and to a farewell symphony on the horn. That afternoon's mail brought Betty two letters, one from her father and one from Nancy Bradford. Mr. Lee wrote that he hoped Betty was n't making a nuisance of herself where she was, that he would have something to say to her when he returned (Betty merely laughed at that and murmured, "Dear old Dadums!"), that her trunks were on the way, Higgins was visiting relatives, the office would honor her demands for money up to a thousand dollars, her mother was well, he had had a touch of rheumatism, they were crossing to Paris the last of the week, and that the usual address there would reach them.

The other letter was less concise and rather more italicised. The gist of it was that Betty was an old darling *duck*, and that she was to come to Magnolia right away—immediately—at *once*—and stay just as *long* as she *could*.

"So you see," said Betty, folding the epistle up and tucking it with the first one into her belt, "your troubles are about over, Cousin Richard. I think I shall go Friday."

"Suppose," he said between jest and earnest, "we don't want you to go, Betty?"

"I'd like that," she approved smilingly, "but, of course, I'd have to just the same."

"I don't see why," he objected.

"Because I don't want to wear out my welcome, my dear Richard. And also because—well, what would Mama say if she heard I'd spent weeks and weeks as your guest?"

"Say? Why should she say anything—except that you were a wise girl? Besides, although I have no desire to hurt your feelings, Miss Elizabeth Carolyn Lee, I might point out that this sudden regard for your excellent parents' wishes is—er—unprecedented."

"Oh, Richard, what words!" she sighed. "But you mean about my

running away from the boat? Well, that, you see, had to be; but there is n't any has-to-be about this, is there? There's no reason why I should stay here and bother you two nice people any longer, when Nancy Bradford is awaiting me with outstretched arms." She was silent a moment, thoughtfully regarding the tips of her white shoes. Then, "I—I don't think I want to go, either," she murmured wistfully.

"Then, why go?" he asked, with an assumed cheerfulness.

"You know. I've told you. But I've had such a good time, Richard. It's all been as nice and jolly as—as anything could be."

"I'm afraid it's been dull—some of it," he amended, recalling the last five days.

"It's been lovely." She nodded her head at the nearest faun. "Ask him. He knows. I've told him so often. I've told him lots of things, Richard. Once"—she paused and cast a side glance up at him, and laughed under her breath—"once I whispered a secret in his ear, and he promised never to tell it to a soul."

"He will tell me," said Richard. "He tells me all his secrets."

Betty's eyes narrowed, and the bubbling laugh rang out. She swung her feet gaily. "Not this one, Richard! If—if he did tell you, you'd be—oh, but you'd be surprised! Shocked, too, I suppose. And—I wonder—" The laughter died away, and an oddly speculative expression crept into her face. "I wonder—if you'd—care!"

"Yes, I know I should."

She studied his face musingly. "Oh, well," she said finally, with half a sigh, "he will never blab."

"I'm never to know this secret, then?" he asked.

"Never—I think. Perhaps, though. Who knows? Oh, what nonsense I'm talking! Richard, when you said you did n't want me to go, did you mean it?"

"Thoroughly," he answered.

"Really, truly? Black-and-bluely?" She reached over and laid her fingers with a momentary pressure on the hand, clasping an empty pipe, that rested on the edge of the seat. "I'm glad," she said softly. "It—it was a big risk, my coming here as I did, was n't it? You might n't have liked me, you see." She considered that a moment, then shrugged her slim shoulders and smiled whimsically. "Poor little Lady Laughter," she said.

"Is she to be pitied?" asked Richard, with a smile which, to his surprise, felt twisted.

"A little, I guess," she replied sadly. "You see—sometimes she—does n't want to—laugh."

"And must she?"

"Yes, because, you see, if she—cried, folks would n't believe her, would they?"

As though to atone for her momentary dejection in the afternoon, Betty was very Betty in the evening. She went to the piano while Aunt Letitia and Richard were still sipping their coffee, and banged out all the rag-time she could remember, sometimes singing, sometimes whistling the song. (Betty had difficulty with her whistling, and the result was more amusing than musical.) Richard asked her to sing "When I Was One-and-Twenty," but Betty shook her head emphatically and plunged into more syncopation. Finally, with a last grand crash, she let her hands fall into her lap and swung herself slowly around on the bench.

"I'm going to bed," she announced firmly.

"To bed!" exclaimed Aunt Letitia in alarm. "Are you ill, dear?"

"I have a headache," replied Betty. "Good-night, Aunt Letitia. Good-night—Dick!"

Her laugh came back to them from the hall, but somehow it sounded not quite convincing. Richard, beginning to understand his trouble, smothered a sigh.

"She misses him," he told himself.

CHAPTER XVII.

BUT the next morning it was the old Betty again, Betty of smiles and of laughter. After breakfast, she took Richard's paper away from him and dragged him out of doors and across the damp lawn, "to smell the morning." Richard, who had passed none too restful a night, was inclined to be silent. His companion, her cheeks like pale roses and her violet eyes aglint with laughter and sunlight, had no such inclination.

"Richard, you're not going to work to-day—my last day with you!"

"I'm afraid I must," he smiled.

"I shan't let you. Think of all the perfectly good days you'll have to write your stupid old book after I'm gone. Let's go for a nice long walk. What is beyond that hill there, Richard?"

"Lee and Lenox and some other places, Betty."

"Oh, is that all?" she asked disappointedly. "Let's make believe we don't know what's beyond, Richard."

"Very well; we'll consider it *terra incognita*."

"Yes, and we'll go and explore." She went through the gate and held it invitingly open. Richard smiled and shook his head.

"If we explored, we could n't make-believe any longer, Betty. Where ignorance is bliss—"

"Tis folly to be wise! So let's not be—to-day. *Please* come!"

But Richard, wanting to go, found pleasure in perversely refusing, and in the end they walked back across the lawn to the house, Betty

declaring that if he tried to work she would stand outside his window and howl!

In the hall: "If you 'll come into the drawing-room, I 'll play for you, Richard. I 'll even try to sing! You know you think I have a perfectly delicious voice. I 'll play 'When I Was One-and-Twenty,' Richard."

In the library: "I think it would be awfully nice if you 'd find an interesting book and read to me, Richard. I 'd be just as quiet and good!"

At the study door: "May I come in a moment, please? I—I want to have another look at it, Richard. When I am far away, I 'd like to be able to—to picture you at your desk, you know." Betty's voice sank pathetically, but the violet eyes danced with mischief. Richard tried to laugh as he slowly closed the door against her importunities, but the laugh had a break in it.

"Go away, little girl," he said.

"Richard."

"Well?"

"Please be nice to me *to-day!*"

A small foot in a white buckskin shoe, and a slender ankle in a white silken stocking, intercepted the closing door.

"I shall be remarkably nice this afternoon, Betty. Please take your foot away."

"Shan't, Richard."

"Then, it will get hurt," he said shortly.

"I 'd rather have my foot hurt than my—my heart," replied Betty dolefully.

"Betty!"

"What?" she murmured from behind the narrow interstice.

"Please take your foot away."

"Now you 're cross with me," she grieved. The foot disappeared slowly. The door closed, and the key turned in the lock.

"Richard."

After a moment, "Well?" he asked.

"I 'm going out in the garden and eat worms!"

Frowning, Richard crossed to his desk. Four white roses that shaded at the base of the opening petals to a pale sulphur yellow nodded from a slender vase on the desk. They occasioned no surprise, for flowers of some sort he found there every morning. And every morning he conveyed them resolutely across to the mantel. But now, his hand closing on the slender stem of the vase, he hesitated. At last, compromising, he set the vase at a corner of the desk. Then, in the act of filling his pipe, he heard soft footsteps on the porch. He swung around. Betty was already pushing open the screen door. He darted across.

"Betty!" he warned.

The door was wide, and she was on the threshold. There was a wicked sparkle in her eyes, and a vivid disk of color in each smooth cheek. Richard sprang to the middle of the doorway and held his arms across it, facing her.

"You're behaving like a child," he muttered impatiently.

"Richard, I want to come in just a minute, please. I want to ask you something."

"You can ask it where you are," he answered grimly.

"I can't, Richard; it—it's something particular." Her eyes were dark and big and held a challenge. "Please be nice to me!"

"Betty, I've told you——" he began.

"I know, but just think, Richard, this is my last day here——"

"Betty, you shan't come in!"

She raised her hands and laid them on the lapels of his coat, twisting the cloth between her fingers. His own hands closed over them to drag them away. Their eyes clashed, hers wide, dark, and defiant, his smouldering with anger. His hands pulled at hers, crushing them roughly.

"You're hurting me," she whispered, her eyes still on his.

"Then, go," he said hoarsely.

"No!"

There was an age-long silence. Into it, as though from another world, came the song of a thrush. Something in his eyes warned her then, and he heard her little startled gasp as she dropped her gaze and released her grasp on his coat. His hands fell away with hers, still clasping them tightly, and then——

How it happened he never knew, but his arms went around her, and he saw the wonder in her eyes as he bent his head and crushed his lips against her mouth.

Then he was standing away from her, dismayed, dizzy, bewildered.

"I told you—to go!" he muttered.

She stood where he had left her, paper-white, her wide eyes filled with wonder. Then a swift flood of color encrimsoned her face, a queer little crooked smile played for an instant about her mouth, and she turned away and with lowered head passed slowly across the porch and down the path and so around the house.

Standing there, he listened to her footsteps die away. For minutes after, he remained without movement. At last he crossed to the desk, dropped into the chair, and took up his pen mechanically. An hour later he still sat there, the pen, dry and forgotten, still between his fingers, an empty pipe in his mouth, and his gaze fixed unseeingly on the white roses. At last he understood.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THEY did not meet again until dinner. Betty, said Aunt Letitia, had a headache. Perhaps, had his aunt been less wise, she might have believed Richard to be afflicted with a similar malady, for he dallied with his luncheon like a man in a dream, and spoke only when she addressed him. He disappeared in the afternoon, dragging a stick in one hand, and appeared again only when the shadows were lying long and deep across the lawn.

He timed himself so well that when he descended the stairs the dinner chimes were still echoing in the hall. If he expected embarrassment on Betty's part, or signs of resentment or displeasure, he was speedily undeceived. Nor was there aught about her to indicate suffering. She had arrayed herself in a gown of Liberty satin, a thing of clinging white folds that sparkled with silver, and a fillet of silver bound her hair. Why the fact that she looked lovely and delectable should have displeased Richard, he could not have explained, I think, but the fact was there. And he was further chagrined by her untroubled countenance and light-hearted ease.

"I suppose," he reflected bitterly, as he took his place at table, "it meant nothing to her; merely an act of brutality on my part, that she has decided to forgive—and forget!" But even as he told himself that, a memory of the look in her face as he had released her obtruded and shook his conclusion. Once in the middle of dinner he glanced across and found an echo of that same expression levelled upon him, but her eyes dropped swiftly before his, and he found his fork wandering erratically about his plate.

They had coffee in the drawing-room. Betty finished her saccharine concoction quickly. For some minutes she moved restlessly about the room, finally seating herself at the piano. "Them as don't want to listen is requested to move out," she announced.

"I don't think any one will leave, my dear," said Aunt Letitia smilingly. "I shall miss your playing so much when you're gone."

"Only my playing, Aunt Letitia?" asked Betty, searching among the notes.

"You much more, Betty," was the response. "I'm hoping, dear, that when you've worn yourself out with social gaieties at the shore, you'll come back to us for a rest."

"Would you really like me to?" asked Betty, playing softly.

"Very much indeed."

"Both of you, Aunt Letitia?"

"Why, of course, my dear."

"I'm not hearing much from the other," said Betty, after a moment.

"The other heartily endorses the—er—invitation," said Richard, very politely. Without seeing it, he knew that the sheet of music on the rack had had a face made at it.

"I shall sing you something very sweet and sad, and you're both expected to weep," said Betty lightly. "All ready? Got your hanky handy, Aunt Letitia?" And Betty began to sing slowly and softly.

Into my heart an air that kills
From yon far country blows:
What are those blue remembered hills,
What spires, what farms, are those?

That is the land of lost content;
I see it shining plain;
The happy highways where I went
And cannot come again,
And cannot come again.

The notes died away, and Betty's hands rested in her lap. There was a long moment of silence in the softly-lighted room. Then,

"It is very sweet," said Aunt Letitia troubledly. "But—"

"But sad? Very well, then. Perhaps you'll like this better. I don't know all the words, but that won't matter."

"Divvy, me mon, come home," says she.
"Ye ken the fair be owér.
The cow an' bairns be waitin' we,
An' hap 't is like to shower."
"Molly, me lass," says I, "me dear,
What tho' the fair be owér?
Me head be clear, I've a shillin' here,
And I'll ha' a wee mug moër!"

A second verse followed the first, and a third verse the second, Betty piping merrily to the rollicking tune. Richard, frowning, arose and sought the dining-room porch. Behind him the absurd song went on to its triumphant ending:

"Me legs be bent an' me coin's all spent,
Thanks be, I can gi' owér!"

Steps crossed the room behind him. The porch was unlighted, and from the doorway she searched the shadows, the light behind her throwing her slender, rounded form into uncertain relief.

"Richard?" she said doubtfully.

"Yes?"

She went to him across the rush matting. "I did n't mean—I'm sorry I was nasty," she said gently. For a moment there was no reply. Then,

"You were not," he said. "But—while apologies are in order, I wish to—to beg your pardon for—what happened this morning. It was a horrid thing to do. I don't know what got into me. I don't know why I did it. I—I'm sorry."

"You don't know why you did it?" asked Betty in tones that sounded perplexed.

"Well, I was angry; I lost my temper; I—"

"But"—Betty's perplexity seemed to have deepened—"it seems such a funny thing to do, Richard, does n't it? To—to kiss a person because you are angry with them."

"Possibly; I suppose so," he granted. "At all events, I've felt like a cur ever since."

"I don't think you ought to blame yourself—much," said she thoughtfully. "I guess it was my fault, Richard. I made you—angry. And, anyhow, it is n't as bad as it would be if—if we were n't cousins."

"Cousins!" he said impatiently. "We're not cousins, and you know it!"

"Then, that explains it," mused Betty.

"Explains what?" he asked, after a moment's silence.

"Explains why it did n't seem—like—like being cousins," she replied reflectively. "Somehow, Richard, it did n't."

"It was n't meant to!" he exclaimed, turning to her for the first time. "I don't feel like a cousin to you! I feel like—like—"

"A 'second'?" she asked helpfully.

He turned away again. There was a long silence. Finally,

"You have n't told me what you feel like," she reminded him.

"Like the devil!" he replied exasperatedly. Then, quickly, "I beg your pardon," he said stiffly. But Betty was laughing softly.

"Oh, Richard, you're funny," she gasped.

"I'm glad that I amuse you."

"Now, please don't be angry again! You know what—happens—when you're angry, Richard!"

"What occurred is evidently only a joke to you," he said, "and I see that I might as well have spared myself the trouble of an apology."

"A joke?" said Betty softly. She shook her head in the darkness. "No, it was n't a joke, Richard. Would it make you any more—more contented if I were to be angry and not speak to you?"

"I'd deserve it," he muttered unhappily. "I—I forgot myself."

"I really—believe—you did!" exclaimed Betty incredulously. "And to think that I did it! That it was I who—who made you so angry that you forgot *yourself*! Why, you don't know how proud I feel, Richard!"

He turned abruptly and strode into the house. When Betty, repentant, overtook him, he was bidding Aunt Letitia good-night. Then, seeing her there, he bowed stiffly.

"No, I won't be said good-night to like that," she declared. "Aunt Letitia, don't let him go off to bed angry with me."

"I'm sure he won't," replied Aunt Letitia gently. But Richard, grim of mouth, had passed into the hall. He was on the landing at the turn of the broad flight when Betty called up to him.

"Richard, Aunt Letitia says you're not to go to bed angry with me."

Richard's steps ceased, and after an instant,

"I am not angry with you, Betty," he answered. "Good-night."

"We-ell, that's better, but it is n't very—very *friendly*, Richard. Could you say 'Good-night, Betty dear'?"

"Good-night, Betty dear," he responded listlessly.

She stamped her foot on the lower stair. "I won't be 'deared' in such a tone, Richard! And I think the least you might do is come back here and shake hands with me. You—you won't have me to say good-night to to-morrow night, you know."

Slowly Richard retraced his steps, his set mouth and tired frown showing that he was about at the end of his endurance. He held out his hand.

"Good-night, Cousin Betty," he said firmly. "I'm sorry you are leaving us. You had better have a good long sleep to-night. Your journey will be tiring to-morrow."

"Good-night, Richard," she answered gravely, as they clasped hands for an instant. "I'm glad you don't want me to go. And I'm sorry I've been mean."

"Good-night," he said again. She watched him go back up the stairs, a little pucker of perplexity above her small nose. Then, just as he reached the top of the flight, "Richard," she called softly.

"Yes, Betty?"

"You said you were sorry for—for something, did n't you?"

"Yes."

"Very sorry?"

"Very sorry, Betty."

"And you want me to forgive you, Richard?"

"Yes."

"Then, I shan't!" she whispered piercingly. "Do you hear? I shan't!"

"I'm sorry," came a tired voice from above. Footsteps sounded along the hall, and a door closed quietly. Betty stood there a moment at the foot of the stairway, twisting a ring slowly about her finger and staring frowningly at the newel. Then she went slowly back to the drawing-room and seated herself on the piano-bench, facing Aunt Letitia. The latter looked up once from her work, smiled, and bent her head again.

"Has he gone up?" she asked.

"Yes."

"I hope," smiled Aunt Letitia, "you made up your quarrel."

"I suppose so," sighed Betty. After a moment she added: "Only—only, I don't think it's very nice of him to be so darned sorry!"

CHAPTER XIX.

BETTY took her departure in the morning. Breakfast was a hurried meal, interrupted by suddenly remembered omissions and consequent scurries upstairs. At the last moment Betty had made the disconcerting discovery that it was a physical impossibility to put some five hundred dollars' worth of attire into a hand-bag, and Curran had been sent to the attic for a trunk, and Sophie summoned to pack it.

Aunt Letitia sat on the back seat with Betty on the way to Stockton, while Richard drove. Curran followed with the trunk in the democrat wagon. The train for once was prompt, and there was only time to check the baggage before it rumbled up to the platform. Then Betty and Aunt Letitia hugged and kissed, both a little tearful, and Richard hurried Betty up the steps of the parlor car. From the platform, she clung to his hand a moment.

"Good-by, Richard. I've had such a good time. And I'm going to write to you, and you've just got to answer it. Will you?"

"Of course, Betty. Good-by."

The train moved, and with a last little squeeze Betty released his hand and blew a kiss to Aunt Letitia. Then her eyes met Richard's and held them until the vestibule curtain came between.

There was a letter two days later, to Aunt Letitia. She read it aloud at the luncheon table. Betty wrote that she had made her journey safely. Mr. Craigie had met her in Boston, taken her to luncheon, and put her on her train later. Magnolia seemed a very jolly place, and the Bradfords were awfully nice to her, but she was homesick for The Hermitage. She thanked them for being so kind to her and ended up with:

P. S. Ask Richard if he is still sorry.

"What does she mean by that?" asked Aunt Letitia.

"Just some of her nonsense," replied Richard.

A few days later there came a letter to Richard. There was not a great deal of it, even though it covered four pages, for Betty's writing was tall and angular, and she often made four words fill a line. She was having a splendid time, she said, and wished Richard could come and enjoy the sailing and bathing. She told of a dance the Bradfords had given in her honor. "And," she wrote, "because I have been mean so often to you, and you were n't there, Richard, I put your name down

for a dance and would n't give it to any one, but just sat it out with Tom Craigie." Richard smiled glumly there. She hoped he would finish his work soon and come to Magnolia for a nice long rest. And she concluded with:

Please write to me immediately.
With cousinly affection,

BETTY.

Richard tried to answer her letter lightly, but succeeded only in producing a very stiff and formal epistle. After he had mailed it, he wished it back. There were no more letters to him, although Aunt Letitia received a short note occasionally.

Meanwhile, July came in with a spell of torrid weather that parched up the lawns and fields, and then gave way to a week of rain. Richard worked on doggedly through the hottest weather and the dreariest, and when August was a week old wrote the last word on his manuscript. A day or two later he took it to New York, spent twenty-four hours there in consultation with his publishers, and then went out to the Jersey hills and stayed a fortnight with some distant relatives on his father's side, playing a good deal of mediocre golf, sleeping eight solid hours every night, and eating like a wood-chopper.

He had feared that with the completion of his work the dull ache and empty longing which had taken possession of him at Betty's departure would become more difficult to bear. But physical exhaustion proved an effective narcotic, and the ache, while still there, was considerably deadened during that fortnight. He returned to Boston at twilight one Sunday toward the last of the month, and, leaving the train at Back Bay, walked the five blocks to his club through a golden afterglow that mellowed and softened the buildings and spires until the scene was like a Turner painting. The club dining-room was almost empty. Richard ordered dinner, and then, after five minutes of indecision, went to the telephone and got the apartment hotel in which Tom Craigie roomed. Mr. Craigie, he was informed, was out of town.

"When is he expected back?" Richard asked.

There was evidently a moment's conference at the other end of the line, and then: "I can't say exactly, sir. Probably about the middle of September. He's in Europe, sir."

"In Europe! Are you certain?"

"Yes, sir. He sailed about two weeks ago. If you'll call up his office, I think you can get his address."

Richard emerged from the booth and returned to his lukewarm soup, wondering. He had firmly expected to hear, after the return of Betty's parents from abroad, of her engagement to Tom. He had even suspected a tacit engagement already. But Tom's sudden departure

to Europe scarcely fitted with his theory. Unless—unless Betty, relenting, had elected to join her parents on the other side, and Tom had followed her over. But that seemed hardly plausible. He might, he told himself, call up the Bradfords' house at Magnolia on the telephone and soon find out whether Betty had left, but, after all, it could concern him but little. Even if he had mistaken her feeling for Tom, and that seemed far from possible, the mere fact of Tom's retreat made his own case no better. And having spent two months trying to accustom himself, though not very successfully, to the prospect of getting along without Betty, it would not be wise to listen to her voice again, even from thirty miles away!

Business affairs kept him in town until afternoon of the next day, and he reached Stockton long after dark.

CHAPTER XX.

He had not announced the time of his return, and consequently Curran was not on hand to meet him. A carriage from the livery stable conveyed him and his luggage to The Hermitage through a star-bright night that already held a hint of fall. Richard felt a dread of homecoming, and apprehension lest a return to the scenes in which Betty had moved might bring it all back again at its worst. His thoughts were very full of her as the horse jogged along the country road, and there was a tight ache at his heart when the carriage turned in at the gate and creaked over the gravel. It was not until they had stopped and he had stepped to the ground, his golf-bag rattling against his legs, that the sound of music came to him through the open windows. It was not like Aunt Letitia to stay up so late when he was away from home. Besides, the air! He stood still and listened, his heart suddenly beating with sledge-hammer blows.

“Which way shall I take the trunk?” asked the driver.

“Keep still!” whispered Richard sharply. The driver, balancing the steamer trunk on his shoulder, froze to amazed attention. From the house floated softly out the notes of the piano and a girl's voice singing.

When I was one-and-twenty
 I heard a wise man say,
 “Give crowns and pounds and guineas
 But not your heart away:
 Give pearls away and rubies
 But keep your fancy free.”
 But I was one-and-twenty—
 No use to talk to me.

“What's wrong, sir?” whispered the driver hoarsely.

Richard made no answer. The voice took up the song again, and he stood silent through the second verse.

The song died away softly. Richard came to his senses with a start. "Take the trunk around to the back," he said in a queer voice. Then, golf-bag in hand, he walked along the path, swung open the screen-door, and entered the hall.

He had not tried to be quiet. His thoughts were in too great a tumult to formulate any plan. He only wanted to see with his eyes and be certain. But he reached the hall without the occupants of the drawing-room suspecting his presence. From where he paused he could see them both: Aunt Letitia by the small table with the low light, bending over her embroidery; Betty on the bench before the piano, her head held a little forward, as though listening, her fingers motionless on the tips of the keys. He stood there for a moment, his heart beating so loudly that it seemed they must hear it beyond the doorway. Then Betty's head turned slowly in his direction, and he saw her hands fly from the keys to her breast as their eyes met. She made no sound, nor did Richard consciously move, but Aunt Letitia seemed to sense something happening and glanced at Betty. Then she was on her feet, coming to meet him.

"Why, Richard, we had no idea you were coming to-night! We were wishing at dinner that you might come, dear, but your letter spoke of Tuesday. Have you had anything to eat?"

"I came through New York without stopping, Aunt. Yes, I've had my dinner." He kissed her and his gaze went past to the drawing-room. Betty was on her feet, smiling. She met him at the doorway with two small hands outstretched to his.

"Here's your bad penny, Richard," she said, "come home to roost. No, no, it's chickens I'm thinking of! Anyhow, here I am again. Please say quickly that you're glad to see me."

"I am," he answered. He tried to match the lightness of her tone, but failed dismally. "Awfully glad, Betty." Then he found that he was still holding her hands, and released them, and followed her into the drawing-room as though in a dream, his coat still on, his golf-bag rattling from one hand and his hat in the other. Aunt Letitia came to the rescue and bore away hat, coat, and bag, and Richard found himself seated in a chair, observing Betty bewilderedly.

"How—how long have you been here?" he asked.

"Since Saturday. I was going to-day, but Aunt Letitia wanted me to wait and see you—" She paused and laughed at herself. "That's a bit of a fib, Richard. Of course she wanted me to stay, but not as much as I wanted to. You see, it did seem a shame to come all this way and not even have a glimpse of you, did n't it?"

"But—er—why—"

"Did I come? Do you think that's a polite question, Mr. Dick? Well, things sort of happened at once. The Bradfords went to the mountains Saturday, and Papa wrote that he and Mama would be back in New York Wednesday. So, as I was homeless, I came here. I did n't even wire; I just came—like I did the other time, you know. But I did n't find any fierce ogre of a man to ask what I meant by trespassing in his garden."

"I did n't," denied Richard, with a smile.

"Not in words, exactly. Well, so that's why I'm here, Richard. And Aunt Letitia was just terribly glad to see me, if you are n't——"

"Betty!"

"And I was terribly glad to see her. And—and I'm a little bit glad to see the ogre again."

"And the ogre," answered Richard unsteadily, "is so glad to see you that—he can't quite believe his senses."

Her eyes dropped away from his, and a little pause followed, during which Aunt Letitia came rustling back from the dining-room and announced that there would be a party in a few minutes. Betty told of the summer's happenings. She mentioned Tom's name again and again, with no trace of hesitation or self-consciousness.

"Mr. Craigie has gone abroad, Richard," said Aunt Letitia.

"Yes, I tried to find him, and they told me that. I was—er—surprised."

"He went rather unexpectedly, I think," said Betty, elaborately careless. "Something about business, he said."

Presently they went into the dining-room, where Maggie had spread cold meats and a salad, and where Richard, protesting that he was not hungry, ate of everything in a sort of daze, and made no effort to keep his eyes from Betty, who was in high spirits. Aunt Letitia was yawning frankly when they left the table. Betty said good-night at the foot of the stairs. Richard watched her until the turn of the flight hid her from view; then, a sudden spirit of daring possessing him, he called up to her.

"Yes?" asked Betty from the hall above.

"I've changed my mind," he said.

"About what, pray?"

"About—about being sorry. I'm not, Betty. I'm *glad!*"

There was no sound from above for a moment. Then a subdued ripple of laughter floated down to him. That was all, that and the soft closing of a door.

CHAPTER XXI.

"I WISH you were not going away again so soon," he rebelled. They were back on the marble seat at the far end of the garden the

next morning. A few monthly roses still showed blooms, but most of them had had their day. Still, there were plenty of blossoms—dahlias, phlox, tritomas, scarlet sage, hydrangeas, and a score of other late-summer flowers. And the bees still buzzed and boomed above the beds, and the fragrance had not lessened, only changed. The fauns smirked on their white columns, and a little breeze swayed the tall shrubs behind them.

"I'd like to stay," she replied, "but of course I should be at the dock to-morrow. As it is, my dear sir, I'm suffering the terrors and discomforts of a night in a sleepless-car for the sake of your society."

"Which I appreciate," he answered rather ceremoniously.

"With wild enthusiasm," she laughed. "Richard, do you remember that first day?" she asked, after a pause.

His face cleared, and he smiled reminiscently.

"I'm not likely to forget it," he replied. "I'm afraid your welcome was not—er—very cordial, Betty."

"And do you remember how you wanted to send me away to placate Mrs. Grundy, Richard?"

"I still maintain that I was right," he answered, smiling.

"Oh, I acknowledge that. Only—well, you were n't flattering. If you had said, 'I hate to have you go, but I see no other way,' I'd have trotted off like a trained puppy. But you did n't; you looked worried and bored and—"

"Please don't go on," he begged. "I acknowledge it all."

"You'd better. But I forgave you long ago, so that's all right, is n't it? There's one thing, though, I have a good mind not to forgive you for, Richard, and that is that nasty, horrid, *miserable* letter."

"Was it so bad?" he asked guiltily.

"It was frightful! Why did you do it?"

"I—perhaps I could n't help myself, Betty. It was horrid, and I realized it afterwards. And I did n't blame you for not replying to it."

"I did, though, twice. But I did n't send them. The first was too mean, and the other was too nice—nicer than you deserved. But never mind all that now. Here I am, and there you are, and we're back in this dear, wonderful garden again, and—Richard, did he ever tell you?" She nodded at one of the fauns.

"No, he never did, Betty."

"Of course he did n't. He's a perfect gentleman of a faun. He promised faithfully that he would n't."

"Well, it was n't so much that, I fancy," said Richard carelessly. "You see, I never asked him. It seemed underhand, Betty. I preferred to rely on you to tell me. I knew you would—some time."

"Really?" she laughed. "Do you want to know? We-ell, perhaps some day I'll tell you."

"Some day? But you're going in a few hours. There'll never be a better time, Betty."

She was silent a moment, studying a pair of slender brown shoes. Finally, "There's one thing, though, I meant to tell you when I came, Richard."

"And what is that?" he asked.

She was silent for another little space. Then, "It—it is something that may surprise you."

"I like surprises—if they're pleasant."

She shot a queer little look of amusement at him, turned her gaze back to her feet, and said doubtfully, "Well, I don't know whether you'll call this pleasant or not, Richard. But—but I'm going to be married."

After a long, long time he said quietly, "I suppose I ought to be very glad, Betty, for your sake."

She nodded without looking toward him. There seemed a deeper flush in her smooth cheeks.

"I suppose I know the fortunate man," he went on presently, trying to speak steadily.

She nodded again.

"It's Tom, of course?"

"No."

"Oh!" he said in surprise. "But I thought—"

"I—I don't believe I can quite tell you—just now—who he is," said Betty hurriedly. "I—I thought I could, but—but I guess I can't."

"As you like," he responded gravely. He sat silent for a while, gazing rather miserably across the sunlit garden, resentfully aware that the old ache was back, much worse than before. "Shall we—go in now?" he asked, rousing himself presently.

"But—don't you want to know about him?" she faltered in dismay.

"Whatever you care to tell me," he replied.

"Well, maybe—" She paused and looked at him anxiously. "Oh, can't you guess, Richard?" she exclaimed breathlessly.

"I? No." He shook his head. "If it is n't Tom—"

"Is—is Tom the only man you know who—who would care to marry me?" she asked, eying her feet again.

"Yes, I think so," he responded slowly, trying to recall any other of her male acquaintances.

"Oh!" It sounded hurt. "Then—then perhaps I'm not—going to be married, after all; Richard."

"I'm afraid I don't—er—understand you," he said puzzledly. wondering if his misery was making him dense. "Is it some one I know?"

"Oh, yes, you know him," answered Betty, with a tiny laugh. "He—he's been here."

"Been here! And it's not Tom, you say? When was he here?" She swung her feet exasperatedly. "I shan't tell you any more," she cried. "I—I've told you too much already. Come, please, I'm going in."

"I think you've told me too little, Betty," he said in a low voice, "or else—" He stopped. She turned her head and shot a glance at him. There was a strange look in his face, a look of mingled wonder and incredulity. Betty turned her eyes swiftly away again, while the color crept into her face as it had that day in the study, flooding over neck and cheeks and brow. Neither spoke, and the boom of the bees and the chirping of birds sounded, as then, as from another world.

"I—I'm afraid to say what I'm going to, Betty," Richard announced, after an age of silence. His voice was low and unsteady. "I'm simply frightened to death. Because—if I am wrong, I'm so terribly wrong that you'll want to laugh at me, and I shan't blame you. But you asked if—if there was no one else who—who cared for you, Betty, who wanted to marry you. You did, did n't you?"

Betty nodded, her face turned away from him, her small hands gripping the edge of the seat so that the knuckles showed almost as white as the marble.

"And you said he had been here." Richard stopped, trying for courage to go on. "There's only one other I know of, Betty, and he—" His voice trailed away. "It's absurd," he muttered.

After a moment, without movement, "Lots—of things—are absurd," murmured Betty.

"Then—this man you are going to marry, Betty," asked Richard desperately, "does he—know it—yet?"

It was an absurd question on the face of it, a question which Betty might well have resented. But she did n't. She only laughed a ghost of a little laugh, a half-frightened, rather sobby little laugh, as she answered in what was scarcely more than a whisper:

"Not yet, but—he's—beginning—to find it out!"

"Betty!" His voice was hoarse and stern. "Who is he?"

For an instant she made neither movement nor answer. Then she swung toward him with crimson face.

"Oh, you stupid!" she cried indignantly. "It's you, you, *you!* And you had to make me tell you, and I'll never be able to look at you again, and you're so horridly stupid that I won't now, and—"

But the rest was smothered against his shoulder, for, once sure of his ground, Richard was no laggard.

Some minutes later Betty raised her head a little.

"You—you have n't said yet whether you want to, Richard!" she whispered.

His answer, barely audible, seemed nevertheless satisfactory, for the head went down again. But a moment later, as though new doubts had assailed her,

"If you don't—really, you know, Richard—it is n't too late," she said, "because no one knows about—about it, except just we three."

"We three?" he asked bewilderedly.

The brown head nodded as well as its confined position would allow. "Yes, you—and I—and the faun," whispered Betty.

"So that was the secret?" he marvelled.

"Yes. You see, Richard, I just had to tell some one. And he seemed sort of—sort of discreet!"

Richard laughed happily. Then he sighed.

"What?" asked Betty.

"I don't understand it a bit," he replied helplessly. "I thought it was Tom, and I've been so miserable, dear!"

"Tom! Why, Tom's a perfect dear," replied Betty slowly, "but—but I never meant to marry him! He—he thought I did, though. But he was quite nice and reasonable about it. What do you suppose he said, Richard? He said, 'Well, you'll be sort of in the family, Betty, and that's something!'"

"What did he mean, dear?"

"Why, I suppose he meant—I suppose he kind of guessed—about you, sir!"

"Good Lord! And I never suspected it!"

"You! I should say not! How could you with your beautifully classic nose against your old manuscript all the time? Don't you see that I simply *had* to tell you finally? You'd never have found it out by yourself, and I don't suppose you'd ever have asked. Would you, Richard?"

"I think so—after awhile," he responded, laughing.

"After awhile! I'd been an old maid by that time, silly! It's time I was married, too. Why, I'm almost twenty-one, Richard!"

"Then, we'd better hurry," he exclaimed. "Before the gray hairs come, sweetheart. Don't you think so?"

She sat up and squirmed away from him to a distance of a whole yard. "I think," she said gravely, "I—I'd feel more comfortable, Richard, if you asked me."

"Betty," he said softly, "I love you, dear." The hand in his fluttered. "Will you marry me, Betty?"

Betty gravely regarded her shoes for a moment. Then,

"We-ell," she replied doubtfully, "it—it is very sudden, and I'm awfully surprised, but—" Then she turned, smiled adorably, and nodded her head emphatically. And Richard, exterminating the distance between them, took her into his arms again.

Behind them in the tall hedge a thrush burst into golden melody. A breeze crept across the garden, and the flower heads nodded at the news he whispered, as much as to say, "Run along with you! We knew it months ago!" A big, purple-black bumble-bee circled around them inquiringly, and then went booming off again. "At last!" he seemed to say. "Of all silly folks—"

Presently, "Betty."

"Yes?" asked Betty, with a contented little sigh.

"When you told the faun, sweetheart, did you know then? Was it as long ago as that, Betty?"

"Longer," replied Betty, with a soft gurgle of laughter. "Much longer! Why, you poor, innocent old duck of a Richard, you were a goner the minute I saw you!"



OPPORTUNITY AND THE WOLF

BY WILLIAM J. BURTSCHER

O PPORTUNITY and the Wolf
Met at the door
Of an humble cottage.
The one knocked,
And the other howled.
Behind the door
Lived an optimist,
Full of hope.
He was expecting Opportunity,
And heard the knock,
But not the howl.

And then the two,
The Wolf and Opportunity,
Went to another door.
The one howled,
And the other knocked.
Behind the door
Lived a pessimist,
Full of despair.
He was expecting the Wolf,
And heard the howl,
But not the knock.

THE BIG RIVER

By Ellis Parker Butler

Author of "Pigs is Pigs," "Mike Flannery," etc.

I SAW the first steamer that came up the Mississippi with an electric search-light; I stood on the levee at Muscatine and saw, far down the river, the weird, unearthly glow of white on the clouds at the top of the wedge-shaped ray, and saw it dart here and there uncannily, like nothing any one in Muscatine had ever seen before. Think of that! I tell you that was something for a boy to see! No boy born since then can ever see *that*—the first steamer to come up the river with an electric search-light! No, indeed! I thought that thought the very night I saw it.

I think it must have been the *Centennial*, because I was not often down-town after dark in those days, and I *know* I was down when the *Centennial* came in. That was the greatest event in my life. Why, that packet— Well, I shan't attempt to tell you what she meant to the boys of Muscatine. We talked about her for weeks before she came up the river, and the more we talked the bigger and more wonderful she grew. By the time the day of her arrival came she was as long as the *Mauretania*, and as fast as the Twentieth Century Limited. She was due at six, and we went down to greet her as soon as school was out. Five minutes after we reached the levee we began asking the boat agent when she was expected to arrive, and we asked him regularly every five minutes until midnight. As first he said, "Six o'clock." By six o'clock he was saying nothing at all, and after that he said, "Get away from here! Get away from here, now!" We were very much afraid of him, for he always carried a club. Steamboat men always did in those days. At any minute they might have to argue a point with a "nigger" roustabout. So after that we waited until some town magnate walked up to the window to ask, and then we crowded under his elbows, and listened, and went back to our fellows whooping, "She 'll be in in an hour!"

The arrival of the *Centennial* was a great event for the whole town. Before six the levee was well crowded, and after dinner it was packed—men, and women, too, and every boy able to be out of bed. About nine o'clock agent Block began to look worried, like a stage manager with a

full house and the star actor off on a spree. There were great piles of freight in the warehouse, accumulated especially for the *Centennial*, and basket after basket of fresh vegetables and meat, and piles of watermelons, for the *Centennial*, and a few lucky passengers.

"Aw! I bet she 's stuck on a sand-bar!"

"Aw! No, she ain't! She can't stick on no sand-bar!"

"Aw! I bet she can!"

"Aw! No, she can't. She 's made so she can't!"

Some of us had inside information, received from others of us, that the *Centennial* had some mysterious apparatus under her hull that could hump her over any sand-bar that ever clogged the Mississippi. I imagine it was something like a set of iron turtle-legs, that fitted up snugly in good water, and that could be let down and would walk her over the sand-bar on occasion. If a full-grown man had told us the *Centennial* could climb trees, we should have believed it. We could believe anything of a steamboat that had electric lights.

To pass the time, we had a battle with a dozen boys who had waded out to a coal barge. They threw the better part of a ton of coal at us, but we threw most of it back, so not much was lost. Billy Mac, on the barge, got a piece of coal in the mouth and lost half a front tooth. I did n't do that; some other fellow did it. I said so then, and I say so now.

Eight o'clock came—bedtime—and we lingered on. I had wood to bring in at home, but that was no matter—not on the night the *Centennial* was due. Nine o'clock, and the good little boys began to dribble away toward their homes, with a last "Aw! Come on homé, can't you? She ain't comin' to-night."

Ten o'clock! My, but it was dark in the shadows behind the lumber piles. Most of the men began to go home; a few went to the Front Street saloons; the women were all gone. The rows of men and boys on top of the freight-cars thinned out, and Skinny Deever, thin, wicked, and cruel, came down to annoy us. Our dozen of small boys kept close together, with rocks in our hands, in case Skinny should attack us. He did grab Fritz when Fritz ran to the warehouse landing to hear the latest news. He caught Fritz by the arm and twisted the arm backward until Fritz whimpered with pain, and some real gentleman raised his cane and struck Skinny across the shoulders. We let Skinny have a volley of stones. Two of them hit Fritz, and he came back to us limping.

"Aw! He did n't hurt me none. I ain't afraid of him. Wait till I get him alone, and he ain't lookin'. I 'll hit him with a rock."

Eleven o'clock! Half a dozen men sat sleepily on the landing platform. Two or three lay asleep on the lumber piles. The ripples of the river slapped against the side of the coal barge. We talked. It was the only way we could keep awake, and we were careful to keep where the

light from the warehouse window made a yellow patch on the sand. Half past eleven!

"And I doubled up my fist like this," said Fritz, "and I said to him, I said, 'Who 's a sooner?' He says, 'You 're a sooner.' You bet I don't take that word from nobody, so I just—"

"Thud! Thud! Thud!" Silence. "Thud! Thud! Thud!" Silence.

There is not a boy on the shores of the Mississippi from St. Louis to St. Paul that does not know the pounding of the wheels of the big packets as they can be heard while yet the boat is far down the river. There was one boat that came up the river with a patent paddle-wheel. Some smart-aleck invented it, with movable blades that slipped down into the water and pushed and slipped out again noiselessly. Dickens of a boat, that was! What is a packet for if she does n't throw a great cataract of water with her wheel? That boat never amounted to anything from the first. She could n't. The boys did n't like her.

"I hear her! I hear her!" I screamed.

"Put your ear in the sand and you can hear her louder," said Fritz, and all of us put our ears in the sand. We could hear her quite plainly that way.

"Thud! Thud! Thud!" Silence. "Thud! Thud! Thud!" Silence.

"Yeow! She 's comin'! She 's comin'!" I yelled, and the sleepy men on the landing platform stood up and peered down the river. Even Mr. Block came out of his office and looked and listened. He hurried in and lighted another lantern and hung it on his arm, and took his clip of manifests in his hand. *He was ready.*

There were whole intervals when we lost the sound of the paddle-wheel entirely, but the next minute we would hear it clearer than before, and then, suddenly and unexpectedly, we saw the glare of the search-light on the clouds, and the long funnel of hazy light that led up to it. We saw it flash here and there, and dart out of sight as the tender turned it on the river-bank or ahead, and then, suddenly, like a moving city aglow with lights, the boat appeared.

She was like a cluster of sparkling diamonds, twinkling in the darkness down the river. No need to listen to the thud of her paddles now! We could see the search-light illuminate the river-banks and cut across the clouds like a comet, and at moments it glowed like a brilliant at the head of the lesser diamonds. You may be sure we did not miss much. We were there for sensations, and we tried to catch them all. One of us was the first—lucky boy!—to catch the glimmer of her red and green lights, one on either smoke-stack. The search-light cut across from shore to shore, making a huge circle across the sky in its passage, and then, suddenly—

You don't know what it means to hear for the very first time the deep, full-throated, melodious whistle of a new packet! *You* don't know how the heart and the lungs and the liver lift to that sound, or how every boy's every fibre quivers and vibrates to it, until it soaks in and he can never in his life mistake that whistle, or confuse it with any other whistle from Canton to Spokane. The meanest thing a man can do is to buy the whistle of a wrecked packet and put it on some insignificant little local steamer, yet men have been found mean enough to do that. Imagine the feelings of a boy who has loved the deep note of the *War Eagle* or the *Mary Morton* or the *St. Paul*, when he hears its mellow voice speaking from a little one funnelled sand-barge tow-boat! Rank sacrilege!

Why, any boy that was worth being called a boy, in my day, could sit in school and tell you the name of any boat on the river by the sound of her whistle—towboat, rafter, or packet. And if a strange boat whistled, forty-two hands would go up, asking Teacher for permission to get a drink of water. There was a hall window from which we could see the river.

Suddenly the *Centennial* spoke. Her voice pealed out, echoing against the hills and filling the whole river-bottom with sound—two long, long blasts that hung on and hung on as if she was never going to let go of them, and then three short, saucy, snappy puffs of sound, and at the same instant—

We did not know what had happened at first. Three of us stepped backward and fell over a loose board, and the rest of us put our hands over our eyes and backed away. In an instant the darkest night had turned into the brightest day. You could see every splinter on every rough board in every lumber pile on the levee. You could see—that is, if you looked away from the *Centennial*. If you looked toward her you could not see at all. It was the search-light!

Steady and glaring, making us squint and wrinkle our noses, the great, superb, world-upsetting light held on us. On *us*, mind you! Right spang, bang, on us boys! Oh, I say, life is worth living!

Not one of us saw the *Centennial* land. We could n't; we could n't see anything but a glare of light that grew stronger and stronger until we had to look away and see men running toward the levee from every direction—just whooping it up, too. Talk of tocsins and alarm bells! I know now how the scum of Paris came running at the sound of the tocsin (Lesson XLV., Page 345), and how the patriots gathered at the call of Paul Revere (Lesson XXVI., Page 242). You don't have to be killed as an innocent bystander to understand these things if you have seen a *Centennial* land at a Muscatine for the first time. There was cheering like the Fourth of July, and some of the men from the Front

Street saloons had sandwiches in their hands, like Fair Week. You could see your father in that glare of light—and keep out of his way, too.

Well, that was enough for one night, but do you think that was all? With a suddenness that was like the snapping of the fingers the search-light went out, and two great arc-lights over the bow of the packet began to sputter and fizz. They spit and sizzled and grew red at the point, and then burst into clear blue light. Blue? Talk about blue light, and sputtering! There was some excitement to those arc-lights, the first we had ever seen.

That was some improvement over the old tar-stick flares, I guess, that a "nigger" roustabout used to keep burning in two huge iron baskets on either side of the gang-plank while the loading and unloading was going on. They were pretty good, too, burning a devilish red, with great clouds of black smoke pouring upward like a tar-barrel afire, and the mate in his glory on the cabin deck, swearing like a trooper—only ten times worse—and the sweaty niggers shuffle-stepping up and down the gang-plank in a long row, and Block, with his clip of manifests, checking off the goods by the light of a lantern held above his head. It was some sight, too, to see one big nigger standing on the very tip of the great gang-plank as the packets came in, with a noose of cable in his hand, ready to jump ashore and cast it over the end of the big pile twenty feet back from the water's edge. Usually there was a boy atop of that pile, and the way he scrambled down as the nigger came at him with the cable was as good as a schoolhouse afire. And once or twice I have seen the nigger actually miss the pile when he threw the cable noose. That is n't much to see, but it is a great deal to hear. The remarks of the mate, I mean. They say the mates do not swear nowadays. The old river is going to the dogs, I guess.

But when the search-light went out, and the arcs went on, there was no nigger ready with his cable-noose to warp the *Centennial* to the warehouse dock. She did not back and fill to the jingling of those fascinating engine-room bells, trying for half an hour to get snugly alongside the warehouse. There was no cable put ashore at all. The long packet ran her nose gently as near the shore as she could, and the gang-plank (stage-plank, some fellows called it) swung down as if by magic, and the mate stepped ashore and shook hands with Block. I don't think Block kissed him or hugged him. I should have done both if I had been in his place, but it was pretty good as it was, to stand there in the light of the big arcs and shake hands with the mate of a packet like the *Centennial*, just as if the mate was the mate of an ordinary boat. And right in full sight of all the crowd, and more coming from all directions every minute! There's glory for you. And Billy Block did n't swell up and burst with pride after that, either. He was willing to shake hands with quite

ordinary people, even after that night. He shook hands with me—but that was ten years later.

And talk about luck! The *Centennial* did not land at the warehouse at all, but at the levee alongside, right immediately in front of where I was standing, and when the crowd pushed down to go aboard they pushed me aboard. You can guess what I did, can't you? I went up on the hurricane deck and touched the search-light with my own hand! I showed that very hand to every boy I knew the next day. Some of them believed me, and some did not.

Well, there she was, the *Centennial*! She had arrived, and I was there to see her arrive.

I hurried off the packet when the warning bell sounded. I had had enough. I was full to the brim. I had been in her long, brilliant saloon, and had stared into the glowing coals of her furnaces, and had walked around her glistening engines. She was mine.

The bells in her engine-room tinkled, the last loping nigger ran aboard, the gang-plank raised itself and swung around, the exhaust raged its steam into the river, and—on the deck I saw a girl!

She was a yellow-haired little girl in a light blue silk dress, and Heaven only knows how she happened to be up at that hour of the night; but I waved my hat and cried, "Hello!" and she smiled bashfully and waved her hand and called back, "Hello!"

Then the arcs went out. They gave a last sputter, and their tips burned red, and the flash-light burst forth with its glare, blinding my eyes; and when I could see again the *Centennial* was backing into the stream and the flash-light was pointing steadily up-river. I never saw that girl again. I hope to goodness her parents put her right to bed!

We waited until the *Centennial* dwindled to a sparkling diamond brooch far up-river, and then Fritz started for home on a dead run. So did I. What happened when I reached home was merely incidental, but sad. I shan't mention it. I have forgotten it entirely by this time.



JUNE

BY CHARLES HANSON TOWNE

GOD made the earth, and the immortal flowers;
He roused the grass, and set the stars in tune;
Then as we gather blooms He gathered hours,
And dropped them in a bowl one afternoon.

THE MIDDLEMAN

By E. F. Benson

THE doors of Burlington house on this day of the Private View of the Royal Academy had not been open for more than a couple of hours, but already there was no doubt as to which of those polychromatic acres of canvases was destined to be known as the picture of the year. The hanging committee had clearly been in no doubt about it either, and though the picture was a large one and was signed with a name that hardly more than one person out of all those crowds that kept forming and melting and forming again in front of it had ever heard, they had put it on the line in the middle of the long wall in the third room, among the various fantasies of the exhibiting Academicians. On one side of it hung a slightly sentimental composition of a youth and a maiden and a widow and an organ and a stained-glass window, called "Angelic Songs Are Welling"; just above it was a sleek portrait of a railway-director in a fur-coat, with the hand-book of the London and North-Western Railway lying on a table, and on the other side was a small picture of a quantity of young ladies by a marble fountain, neither doing nor wearing anything whatever, and another of heather and some Highland cattle carefully brushed and combed. But the picture that hung in the middle of this rich and assorted company killed all the others quite quickly and painlessly, so to speak, by its own breadth and serenity. It represented a plain middle-aged woman with her hand on the arm of her chair as if about to get up. It was very subdued in tone, but the figure in its black silk dress stood vividly out against the gray background of undecorated wall. She faced the spectator full, and it was hard to say if her mouth had begun to smile. But the tired gray eyes certainly had: they were lit from within by love and tender welcome. It seemed impossible that any one except her son could have painted it; it seemed impossible that a woman could smile so except when she looked on him. The catalogue confirmed this: it was the portrait of the artist's mother, and was by Charles Lathom.

Among the constant but changing crowd that chattered and wondered in front of it was the only man who really knew anything about Charles Lathom, but he knew a good deal. This individual was evidently well-known to many of the crowd, for he was continually in conversation with its component members, and they listened to him with considerable

respect, for his knowledge of art was quite unrivalled. In person, he was conspicuously tall and stout and clay-colored, and his pale, bulging eyes had heavy bags of loose skin below them. His hair was rather thin and almost suspiciously black, and he had a habit as he talked of caressing one side of his face with his plump beringed hand, as if to make sure that a whisker had not grown there since he shaved last. When he moved, a faint suggestion of wall-flower scent stirred in the air. He did not, it may be remarked, let slip the fact that he knew the artist. For so large a person he had a singularly soft and low voice.

"It is a marvellous creation, my dear lady," he was saying. "I tell you without exaggeration that there has appeared no portrait of more magical insight and technique since Velasquez painted Philip the Fourth. I can't get away from it: I must go and see the other rooms, but I am riveted here. Yes, Charles Lathom. Ah, how do you do, dear Lady Urquahart? You are the very person we want. You know everybody, so give us a *précis* about Charles Lathom."

Lady Urquahart screwed up her mouth sideways when she talked.

"Charles Lathom has consecrated the profaned walls of the Academy anew," she said. "I was going to ask you for information. They tell me he had a small picture in the show last year."

Arthur Craddock caressed his face. He remembered that picture perfectly well: at the present moment it hung discreetly and privately in his own bedroom.

"You don't say so!" he said. "Tell me about it. Did it show any of the promise of this? I am ashamed not to remember it."

Lady Urquahart turned a slightly suspicious eye on him.

"I am told you mentioned it in your review of the Academy last year," she said.

He smoothed his face more strenuously.

"Worse and worse," he said. "I thought I had only missed it, but now it seems that I have forgotten I did not miss it."

This particular group ebbed away again, rather to Arthur Craddock's relief, for he had a slight distrust of Lady Urquahart, and he was glad to see a tide of fresh friends to whom he could rhapsodize afresh about the portrait, being quite clever enough not to compare it to Philip the Fourth too often. Occasionally he rested his hand in the pocket of his light summer overcoat, and felt with intense and secret satisfaction that a small strip of folded paper reposed there. On it was written Charles Lathom's receipt for the purchase-money of his mother's portrait.

He had already written a first notice of the exhibition for one of the leading papers, in which he had done justice, so he considered, to this masterpiece; but he had bought several water-colors this year, and in-

tended to devote half a column to this rather neglected but charming branch of art. For this it was necessary to spend an hour or two in the room where they hung. But he found time to stroll into the Ritz hotel when he felt inclined for lunch, knowing that there would be any number of "Academy" lunches going on, and that many artists would have asked their friends there, and be only too glad to bid him to their tables, in view of the undoubted influence he had in the press. But he engaged himself instead to an American who was by way of being a purchaser of paintings, and really only required to be told what to buy. Craddock loved the atmosphere of opulence, and he had the nose of a truffle-hound for wealth. He had a good deal of money himself, and the smell was familiar to him. And having lunched very cosily, he went back to the water-color room.

Arthur Craddock had a very sumptuous flat in Berkeley Square, where no windows were ever opened, but the air of it was revivified by the burning of pastilles or sprigs of lavender, and about six o'clock that evening he was wafted thither in a red-plush lift, and rested for a while after his strenuous day. Two or three people of some importance to him were going to dine with him, and he had asked them all at different hours, since he wished to confer with each of them privately. Thus the first of them, who was intimately connected with pictures, and might, for short, be called a dealer, was, after the conference, deposited in a small chamber known as the library, while Craddock went to dress. The second guest was a notable publisher, who, being intimate, had the felicity of seeing him change his clothes. The third was a theatrical manager who could not act, but always did. They held an exceedingly important interview on Craddock's return from his bedroom.

Craddock was both *gourmand* and *gourmet*: he ate largely, with intense appreciation, and, having made a particularly good dinner that night, he let his guests go away rather early, for he had a few affairs that needed his sole supervision. But in his interviews he had made several good strokes of business, and it was in the best of spirits that he unlocked a red-leather despatch box, whistling to himself the Spring-song out of the "Valkyrie," with the expression of a replete seraph. He also deposited in the same box Charles Lathom's receipt for a check of one hundred pounds. Considering that for that sum he had purchased a portrait that might stand next the masterpiece of Velasquez, this did not seem an unreasonable price to pay. There were other receipts in this box: one showed that Frank Armstrong acknowledged the receipt of five hundred pounds as payment in full for all rights connected with his play "The Dilemma." Craddock and the actor-manager had talked about this. Five hundred pounds seemed a good deal of money, but, on the other hand, "The Dilemma" was a very good play indeed.

Though Craddock himself created neither pictures nor plays nor novels nor music, he had a unique gift of artistic appreciation, and, with admirable industry, had worked hard all his life to cultivate this and bring it to full flower. Like most first-rate talents, it was worth a great deal of money to him, and not less marketable was his *flair* for seeing what the public would appreciate. Often he bought work which he himself believed to be bad art, if he felt that the public would admire it. And the most of his money he made by a very simple plan: he financed (on terms) young men whose work he believed would make a name for them and a bank-balance for himself.

Charles Lathom was one of these. In last year's Academy Craddock had seen a small picture of a boy just in the act of taking a header into a pool below a weir. In many respects the work was crude and immature, but there was a vitality, an energy as of a coiled spring, about the leaping figure that struck at the root of the matter, and Craddock purchased it on terms that to this young and absolutely unknown artist seemed royally generous. For Craddock not only paid him fifty pounds down for it, but agreed to pay him four hundred a year for the next four years for the option of purchasing any two pictures of his each year at one hundred pounds apiece. Thus for the next four years young Lathom had the certainty of an income of four hundred pounds, and, if his work pleased his patron, of six hundred pounds a year. It seemed to him an offer of almost dream-like splendor. But Craddock did not feel he had made any mistake about this: he saw at once that the young man had the true fire, that he could no more help painting than he could help breathing, while his extreme youth—he was only just twenty-one—would make him eager and vivid. And now even in his first year he had turned out a masterpiece that should repay Craddock for at least half his past and future outlay.

Affairs did not always turn out so happily. Not so long ago Craddock had made a similar bargain with a novelist, giving him a small annual income, and claiming half that he made by his pen. On which the ungrateful wretch had written nothing whatever for three years, which was the period of the bargain, but spent them in planning and thinking over a romance that he wrote as soon as he was free again, which went into twenty-seven editions. But then he was a calculating, middle-aged brute, and Craddock had learned wisdom from that atrocious transaction, and now did business only with eager young men in whom the lust and need of production blazed irresistibly.

He felt very comfortable about the purchase of "The Dilemma," and his option to take from Frank Armstrong his next three plays on rising terms. He himself was dramatic critic to a leading paper, and his perceptive power with regard to plays was not less acute than with regard to pictures. His critique, already half-written, upon the pro-

duction that was to take place to-morrow night, would certainly convince the public that a masterpiece had been presented. It would induce them to go, and the play, he felt certain, would make them glad they had gone. Being a professional critic, he did not overrate the power of criticism in insuring a success, but the critic, at any rate, was possessed of the sweet uses of advertisement. He could rouse curiosity, and if the advertised article was good, it would do the rest.

But this jolly remunerative life had, as has been said, its drawbacks. Sometimes, as in the case of the abominable novelist, his generosity would be treated ungenerously, sometimes, though not often, he backed the wrong horse, and in consequence he was still not fond of the word "post-impressionism." When first that maniac school exhibited in the Grafton Gallery, he had given vent in the press to a series of Lobges-gangs, after quietly purchasing a good many of the pictures. Personally, he detested the extravagance and impertinence of these nightmares, but he thought that the public might easily be taken in, and would see genius (if instructed to do so) in incompetence. But at present his purchases were still on his hands, and, though he did not despair of ultimately coming out on the right side, he did not yet feel secure of shooting his rubbish profitably. But he had hopes of some golden and totally uneducated Americans whom he had arranged to take to the gallery of the dealer who had been his guest to-night. There they would see these treasures, and have their wonders pointed out. An impecunious Duchess was going to give tone to the proceedings.

Though he felt very comfortable about "The Dilemma," he was not quite at ease about the author of it. This was a high-spirited young man in great want of money, who had, unlike most artists, a keen business head, and had swiftly calculated, when their bargain was being struck, how much his patron would clear if the play ran with full houses for a hundred nights.

"You will be comfortably situated," he said. "Really, I think you might give me six hundred pounds."

Craddock was wise enough not to take the attitude of a munificent art-lover whose soul was above money. Armstrong would certainly have said, "Rot!"

"I am not prepared to risk more than five hundred pounds," he said. "If your play is a failure, which it easily may be, I lose it all. You must remember also that it has been rejected by three managers."

This was true: he had sent it to the wrong ones.

"Oh, well, I'll sign," said young Armstrong. "And it would be immensely convenient if you would let me have the money without any delay whatever. Thanks: I suppose your check is good. Now, mind you write me up. Ta-ta."

Craddock looked hastily round.

"Our transaction is a private one," he said.

"Oh, rather! Ta-ta."

It was not a nice spirit somehow . . . also Craddock wished that Armstrong had not by mischance met Charles Lathom shortly after this, at Craddock's flat. The two fiery young fellows had clearly liked each other, and would perhaps become friends. As a rule, Craddock preferred the recipients of his bounty not to meet. But he would have found it difficult to give definite reason for this, since he treated them all with equal liberality. Yet, somehow, he did not want his liberality to be talked about. All his transactions were supposed to be private, but two young men might easily blurt out something to each other. But even then it was hard to see how they could annoy him. Signed contracts were not annulled by chatter.

Regardless, however, of their patron's wishes on the subject, these two young men had struck up a great friendship, and a few months later were spending September together on the coast of Norfolk, bathing and playing golf, and, when the rage for production became imperative, sketching and scribbling ardently. During the last week or two Lathom had made half a dozen admirable impressions of his friend's strong and irregular face, and Armstrong had filled half a notebook with plots and half-written scenes and snatches of dialogue. "The Dilemma" had long ago achieved its century of performances; indeed, this morning, as they lay half-dressed on the sands after their bath, Lathom announced on the authority of the newspaper he had brought down with him that the hundred and fiftieth performance would take place in a week's time.

"And it is believed that the young and gifted author has just bought the freehold of entire Piccadilly," he fatuously added.

Frank Armstrong gave a little exclamation of impatience and disgust. Hitherto the subject of Mr. Craddock had been studiously avoided by both of them, for both disliked the man at whose house they had first met; both felt also that he had "done" them. In addition, their several transactions were supposed to be private.

"I might have," said Frank. "But I was an ass."

"Really? Did you make a bad bargain over your rights? By Jove, here's a funny thing!"

"What's that?" asked Frank.

"Here are you and I side by side on the sand, and side by side with the paragraph about you there's one about me. Good Lord! The portrait of my mother was bought yesterday for eight hundred guineas. Blast it all!"

Frank Armstrong began to laugh.

"I suppose you made a bad bargain, too," he said.

"Yes; quite bad."

He looked up, and comprehension came to him in a flash.

"I believe we're both in the same boat," he said. "I sold my pictures, you sold your play. I sold to Craddock. I did worse, too——"

"Same dealer," said Armstrong; "and I did worse."

Lathom was getting the sand from between his toes, preparatory to putting his socks on.

"What?" he shouted. "Do you mean that old oil-and-color-man goes in for the drama, too? Is it really so?"

Explanations followed, and both these amiable young men got very quiet and angry.

"And he has got an option on two more of my plays," said Armstrong at length. "Hi! I think I've got hold of the tail of an idea. Let me catch firm hold of it. Yes, by Jove, I've got it! Listen, Charlie."

Five minutes later Frank had pulled out his notebook, and with gesticulations and occasional pauses and readings was scribbling furiously. Sometimes Lathom rolled with laughter on the sand, sometimes he got angry again and swore. And had Craddock, who was staying in a rich house up in Sutherland, where he dressed as a sportsman, but only sat in the garden, had any inkling of what made these two efficient young brains so busy, he would have had his comfort seriously impaired.

It was October, and midway through that delectable month. Craddock always delighted in the autumnal resuscitation of London life and the opening of sale-rooms, and, established again in his sumptuous flat, he was delighted to receive a note from Frank Armstrong, saying that he would like to have a talk about his next play. He felt sure, it appeared, that his subject was solid, and he was satisfied with a scene or two that he had sketched. Oddly enough, by the same post there came a note from Lathom, which rather elusively spoke about a portrait he wanted to paint. Craddock knew already that the two were great friends, and he had a certain curiosity to see whether they had spoken to each other about their patron. Even if they had, they were as helpless as butterflies on pins. So he asked them both to dine with him next night. Probably they had dress-clothes, since, owing to his bounty, they were both possessed of a small but settled income, but it would be kinder to tell them not to dress.

They appeared together, brown from their east-coast holidays, and brisk and smart. With his artistic eye, Craddock saw how admirable a subject would his young playwright be for his young artist, and he felt he had guessed the proposed subject of Lathom's portrait. It would suit both patron and artist admirably.

"I see, I see," he said to Lathom, laying a rather moist hand on his shoulder. "Paint him when he is at work on his new play."

"Paint whom?" asked Lathom.

"Your friend and mine. Come, let us go in to dinner. I want to hear all about the portrait and the play. You both made sketches?"

Craddock saw Lathom's steady level eyes look across to the other, and, turning, saw the ghost of a smile on Armstrong's crooked mouth, which had such character.

"I've brought the outline of the play with me," he said. "I propose to call it 'The Middleman.' Good title, do you think?"

Craddock glanced from one to the other, and back again. He began to regret that he had asked them together, but hoped that dinner would blow away the slightly hostile atmosphere of which he was conscious. He himself always felt more friendly after dinner.

"Capital title," he said. "We will have a good talk about it afterwards."

This time a more distinct signal passed between the two.

"I think we may as well talk first," said Armstrong. "We came rather early on purpose. Well, the title is 'The Middleman,' and there's no hero in it. There's a beast instead. He gets hold of young artists, and induces them to sign contracts for their future output. Then he puffs them in the papers. He's a big sort of chap, rather oily and encouraging. That's all the first act—not much action except contract-signing. We get action presently."

Not the stupidest of Craddock's enemies ever accused him of being stupid. He grasped the situation completely, and turned to Charlie Lathom, who had taken up a sheet of scented note-paper and was swiftly sketching on it.

"And your share in this conspiracy?" he asked.

Lathom made two more touches, a dot and a line.

"I don't know what you mean by conspiracy," he said. "It's a funny word. What I want to do is to paint, not Frank's portrait, but yours. It will be something like this."

He handed his host an unmistakable loathsome parody of himself.

Armstrong leaned forward, again crookedly smiling.

"About the play, Mr. Craddock," he said. "You've got an option on my next play, and on one after that. Well, my next play is 'The Middleman.' To go on with the plot, he gets bust up, exposed, blown upon. He begins, you see, as a fashionable sort of gent, who dines out. The last act will be rather pathetic. The Middleman dies in a garret, with gray hair. He has grown quite thin. He has been blown upon, and nobody gives him options any more, or asks him out to dinner. Perhaps you may not care to exercise your option on—".

"I shall be delighted to exercise an option for libel," said Craddock, off his guard.

"Libel?" asked Armstrong, in the voice of a misunderstood child.

"Oh, do you really see a remote resemblance between the man in my play and—and yourself? If you do, can you really imagine yourself bringing an action for libel against me?"

"There's not a decent manager in London who would put on such a farrago of nonsense," said Craddock, switching off the subject of libel.

"I dare say we can find an indecent one," said Armstrong.

Charlie Lathom was getting impatient.

"About my portrait," he said. "I shan't libel you. I shan't say it is you at all. I shall just call it 'The Middleman.' I shall send it to some spring exhibition just about the time when Frank's play appears. Of course you can exercise your option and buy it and suppress it. Then I shall do another one, not so kind."

Craddock got up, and began walking to and fro in his scented room. Think how he might, he saw no way out of this very awkward position. He knew quite well that after the success of Lathom's last portrait, any gallery would welcome a work by him; he knew that after the success of Armstrong's play any manager would gladly produce another by the same pen. There was nothing to be done except surrender and discuss terms.

"You young devils——" he began.

"No abuse, now," said Armstrong. "Of course, I know it's irritating."

"What do you propose?" asked Craddock, after a pause.

"That's more polite. You see, we are like those Johnnies on strike: we have drawn up our irreducible minimum. That's your show, Charlie: spout away!"

"We're not going to be hard on you," said Charlie. "We're only proposing to do what is obviously fair. What we ask is that you furnish us with a complete account—something we can test, you know—of all the money you have at present made out of us. You have been our agent, and a jolly good one, and so out of that we shall pay you a liberal fee—say, ten per cent. We shall be delighted to employ you on the same terms in the future, and you will continue to do your best for us. If you accept that, we shall say nothing about what has already occurred. You needn't say we are Shakespeare and Velasquez any more, because that is rot. But for any orders you get for us, any commissions, you understand, we will employ you. You shall arrange the price, and make it as stiff as possible, because you will get your percentage. Of course we shall both return to you the money you have given us, and you will pay us what you have earned from us, deducting ten per cent. Finally, we shall have to see you tear up the agreements we made with you."

"Loud applause," said Armstrong.

Again Craddock took time for consideration.

"And if I absolutely refuse your terms?" he asked.

"We shall set to work. Very hard!" said Armstrong. "I can read you some bits of scenes. Especially the one in the garret. Charlie and I come to see you—"

Craddock among his other gifts had a certain sense of humor.

"You young devils!" he said again, but in a different voice. "Let's have dinner. We will do business afterwards. I wish I had never set eyes on either of you."

Armstrong got up.

"You accept?" he said.

"I can't help it."

"Right oh. I'm awfully hungry."



RICH MAN, POOR MAN—

BY FRANCIS HILL

O H, joy that burns in Denver tavern!
The lights, the drink, the ceaseless play!
A kingdom, dull within a cavern,
Across the boards he flings away.

Then night that falls on either mountain
(Ah, bitter black it falls between);
But he, like water to its fountain,
Is come again where life runs clean.

So Death shall find him, delving, peering.
Still silver rock, still golden sand.
He weeps to hear the magpies' jeering.
But he is back in his own land.

A WHITE PRECIPITATE

By Rex T. Stout

“EVANS!”

“Yes, sir.”

“Take these papers out of the room.”

Without a sign of surprise at the unusual order, the servant gathered up the four morning newspapers and started to leave. As he reached the door he was again halted by his master’s voice:

“And, Evans!”

“Yes, sir.”

“If Mrs. Reynolds asks for them, tell her they have n’t come.”

“Yes, sir.”

Left alone, Bernard Reynolds crossed to a chair by the open fire and seated himself thoughtfully. Even such a catastrophe as this of which he had just read failed to move him from his accustomed calm. Of course, the news must be told to his wife; how, was the difficulty. For himself, he was almost glad; materially inconvenient though it was, it meant the removal of a barrier which he had already found an impediment in his search for happiness. Further, he knew that Paula herself would find the immediate loss an ultimate benefit; but he also knew that, coming thus suddenly, the blow would be a hard one. It was with such methodical reflection that he met a shock which to most men would have meant keen disappointment, and to some despair.

As he extended his hand to lower the flame in the coffee-lamp, Evans reentered the room, bearing a loaded tray. Soon after, Paula came in. Bernard crossed the room to greet her, and escorted her to her chair at the table.

In the six months since the Reynoldses’ wedding, the ceremony of breakfast had undergone a gradual but complete change. At the first dozen or so there had been very little eaten, and a great deal of foolishness. It had assumed the character of a morning worship, and Evans, who was orthodox, had been much disturbed by the order to place both chairs at one end of the table. At the present time, it was solely a matter of mastication and digestion. And yet Bernard declared—to himself—that the first had been by far the better, which seems to be a pretty good refutation of that disagreeable saying about men’s stomachs.

On this particular morning the silence was oppressive. Even Evans

seemed cast down by something unusual in the air, and was moved out of his habitual solemnity and dignity to an unheard-of sprightliness. When he served the jelly fifty seconds too soon, in a valiant attempt to start something, and received no notice whatever for his effort, he gave up in despair, and received his nod of dismissal with gratitude. When he had gone Paula raised her eyes from her plate for the first time and looked at Bernard. Her eyes were red, and her lips were set in a firm, straight line.

"I suppose," she said, "that last night settles it."

Bernard returned her gaze calmly. "What do you mean?"

"For six months we've been trying to decide whether we've made a mistake. There is no longer any doubt about it."

Bernard hesitated a moment before replying. "Paula, you've said something like this twice before. You know how I've tried—but it's useless. It's purely your imagination. You've discovered somehow that it's bad form to have your dreams come true, and all I can do is to wait till you get over it."

"And last night—was that only my imagination?"

Bernard sighed hopelessly. "Will you never understand? Have n't I told you what my future demands?" Then, in a softer tone, "You know very well it's all for you. In order to succeed in my profession, a man must have friends. I'm trying to make them—that's all."

"And, I suppose, in order to be useful, they must be agreeable and—attractive."

"I've told you before that that's nonsense. It's pure rot. If you knew how silly—" He checked himself. "But I don't wish to be rude. There is a particular reason why I can't be. Only, for God's sake, have a little sense!"

For a full minute Paula was silent. The line of her mouth trembled, then tightened, and her hands, resting before her on the table, were clenched. Then, as though with an effort, she spoke slowly and calmly:

"Are n't you just a little tired of being a hypocrite, of living a lie?"

Bernard rose to his feet, astonished. "Paula!"

"That's what it amounts to. You may as well sit down and talk it over calmly. Ever since we were married, you've done nothing but lie and pretend."

"Paula! For God's sake—"

"Please *listen*. I'm not going to descend to heroics, and I don't care to listen to any. We may as well face the truth. We made a bad bargain, but we may as well admit it *was* a bargain. You pretended to love me, and I"—she caught her breath, and then went on calmly—"I pretended to love you. I don't know why I did it, but I know why you did. Of course, you wanted my money. As for me, I suppose it was your talent, your career."

Bernard, still sitting opposite her, controlled his voice with an effort. "You seem to have analyzed us thoroughly," he said drily. "And you—you are sure it was only pretense?"

"Have I not said so?" Paula laughed harshly. "Of course, it hurts your vanity. But you'll soon get over it. Besides, it will restore your peace of mind. You will no longer be under the necessity of attempting to deceive me. Our marriage becomes purely a business partnership, to which you furnish the brains and I the money. There will be no more nonsense about an affection that does n't exist."

"Paula, I don't believe you." The voice was strained, appealing. "Whatever you may think of me, I can't believe you to be—as you say you are. I *won't!*"

"I have said—" Paula began coldly.

"I know." There was a sudden change in Bernard's voice. "And it would hardly be a compliment to suppose you are lying *now*. Very well; I accept your terms. It is strictly a business partnership. You admit I have the brains?"

"Of course."

"And you the money?"

"That is what I said."

"And the one, I believe, balances the other?"

"What is the use of repeating it all?" Paula's voice held both weariness and despair.

"I just want to get it straight. I want to know exactly where I stand. You are sure I am furnishing my full share?"

"What do you mean?" cried Paula, startled by his tone.

Bernard, ignoring her question, struck the bell on the table sharply, and when Evans appeared, almost immediately, turned to him.

"Bring me the *Morning News*."

Evans disappeared, and a minute later returned with one of the newspapers which he had previously been told to remove. Bernard, his hand slightly trembling, handed it across the table to Paula, indicating with his finger a double-column head on the first page. His voice was tense with feeling as he said:

"That is what I mean."

As her eyes caught the head-line Paula gave a little involuntary cry, and the paper fell from her hands. Then, as she read the first two or three paragraphs, and realized the full meaning of them, her face grew pale and her eyes sought Bernard's in a sort of dumb protest.

"It is n't true!" she cried.

Bernard was silent.

"It *can't* be true! It means—everything is gone! It *can't* be true!"

Then, while Bernard sat silently regarding her, she bent over the

paper and read the article through to the end. When she spoke her voice was dry and hard. "If—but there are no ifs. It is all gone. I have nothing. I am a pauper."

"Worse than that." Bernard spoke grimly. "You are in debt. I spoke to Grimshaw an hour ago over the telephone. Dudley has disappeared—which means that his liabilities must be met by you. Grimshaw says there is absolutely no hope."

Paula stared at him as though fascinated, unable to speak.

"Well?" she said finally.

Bernard arose and, passing around the table, stood by her chair. "It is well," he said, looking down at her. "Our partnership is dissolved."

Paula recoiled as though he had struck her. "You mean—"

"What I say. And I thank God for it! Do you think I have n't known what you've been thinking all these months? A thousand times I have read in your eyes all—and more—that you have said this morning. It has made my life unbearable. That is why I'm glad it's all over—that the weary farce is ended."

"Then—you are through?"

"With the partnership, yes. Your share of the capital has disappeared; therefore the firm belongs to me. My first care will be to keep it intact." He stood silent for a moment, regarding her gravely.

"It is n't what you said that hurts. Your every action and thought has been a silent accusation which it was impossible for me to answer. I have been dumb, but not blind. You have condemned me without a hearing. You need n't have told me that you have never loved me; if you had, you could never have believed me to be—what you have said."

Paula lifted her eyes slowly, and tried in vain to meet his. Then, suddenly, the strength of her lie failed her; she buried her face in her hands and sobbed brokenly. "I can't give you up! I can't!" she moaned.

Then, as though by magic, Bernard's face cleared, and was filled with light. "Good God! Of course not!" he exclaimed fiercely. "I won't let you! Did n't I say the firm belongs to me?"

When Evans answered the bell, ten minutes later, he stopped short in the doorway and viewed the scene before him with unconcealed dismay. Both chairs—occupied—were placed squarely together at the farther end of the table.

"Evans," said Bernard, "I want to ask you a question. I suppose you have read the papers?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, you know of our—good fortune. Thank God, we have to economize! Your—er—pickings will probably be reduced. The question is, do you want to stay?"

"No, sir," said Evans promptly. "Not if I have to serve breakfast. I can stand the rest."

"Evans!"

"How can I help it, sir? Look at that!" He pointed at the chairs indignantly. "You know, sir, I've always tried to keep my self-respect, which I can't do going into rooms *backwards*. And even for the sake of your father—"

"Very well." Bernard grinned happily. "We'll have Maggie serve breakfast after to-day."

Evans turned to go.

"But," Bernard continued, "this morning you'll have to suffer. Bring back the fruit-tray and make another pot of coffee. We're going to celebrate."



THE CRY OF MAN-HEART

BY J. B. E.

I WANT my Mother!
Home to her arms I would come running
To tell the failure I have made—
Failure that men have called success.
I want Mother to wrap her arms around me,
Hiding my hot eyes on her neck,
So blotting out all searing sights
Of mad racing after Sodom's fruits,
Unholy struggle for preferment,
Mean conniving for gold—all! all!

On her breast I would weep out my long confession,
While Mother answers my unuttered heart-questions
Just as when I was a lad.

I want once more to hear her voice
Whisper the love-name I bore long ago,
Telling me that nothing—nothing—nothing
Could ever make me less her boy.
I want to hush every other sound while she speaks—
Commending what she may, chiding gently, too;
Showing me what things really mean.

I want my Mother!
Only her shoulder can pillow my head—now;
She will know how wealth and place,
Follies and honors, studies and friends,
The occupations of a busied life,
Have all proved pillows of stone—
Mother will know,
And she will gentle me to rest once more,
Nor fear that my stain can smirch her whiteness.

So when her white and slender fingers
Smooth back my graying locks,
And she lays cool lips upon my tired forehead,
Maybe it will all be as it used to be
When I sobbed out upon her heart
The tragic woes of childhood:
Maybe I can remember the things I 've guiltily forgot;
Maybe I shall find cleansing in her tears,
And healing in her understanding love.

And if, beyond, the light still shines,
Her unfaltering faith will make it out;
Her loving lips may even kiss
My heavy eyes to sight again,
And so restore to me the hope
And the will
To look ahead with purpose
To serve my Day until the day closes—
And then too
I shall want my Mother.



WITHOUT RESERVATION

By Jane Belfield

“**S**UPPOSE we drop the mask, Walter, and say to each other just what we really think. Aunt Maria won’t be back for an hour, at least. Let’s be absolutely honest and peep into each other’s mind. It will be great sport.”

“I should n’t dare.” The man turned from his survey of the frost-covered lawn and quizzically regarded the girl by the fire. “It might n’t add to my happiness to peer into your thoughts; and at present I do not know that it is safe to show you mine.”

Catherine’s small foot moved restlessly over the fur of the brown bearskin rug. “You might humor me, Walter. You have n’t humored me for an age.”

“Ah!” He came over and drew a chair close beside hers. “If you put it that way—you must be aware that to please you is my sole *raison d’être*. But, my dear girl, the last man I heard of who started out in the morning to speak nothing but the truth landed in jail before night. It’s a dangerous business—speaking one’s mind; and first you must be sure of your audience.”

“But surely nothing can happen to either of us here and in one short hour. I only ask you to indulge in plain speaking for a single hour.”

“Of sixty minutes. Why, Kate, you could n’t stand the—er—revelation for ten!”

“As bad as that!” She regarded him with coquettish brows aslant. “Just try me!”

“Very well.” Her companion leaned back and took out his watch. “Begin. I’ll time you. Ten minutes, now, for unveiled truth.”

“Oh, no; that will never do! You must give yourself away first. How do I know that you are going to speak what you really think after you know what is in my mind?”

“And how do I know that you will not fashion your post-mortem remarks according to what I say?”

The girl dimpled and shook her flossy head. “You are supposed to be clever, Walter. Think of a way—do.”

The young fellow crossed to her desk and lifted a writing-pad.

"You are a rapid writer, Kate—as I happen to know from the various octavos with which you have favored me. Do you use a stub?"

"No; one of those large pens."

"Now make yourself comfortable at your desk, and for ten minutes we both will write exactly what comes into our minds, without reservation. Is it a bargain?"

"Without reservation!" She dimpled again, excitedly.

"When I say, 'Time!' we trade pads. Promise to play fair, Kate?"

"Oh, I'll promise fast enough." The girl swept to her desk. "I'll scribble just as I think, if *you* will."

"I will—as they say in the marriage ceremony." The young man rested the pad on his knee and took a fountain-pen from his pocket. "It is now one minute of twelve. When the mantel clock strikes, begin!"

A sudden silence, broken by the chime of the little silver clock and the sharp snapping of freshly piled logs.

If I am going to tell her what is in my mind [he traced in bold rapid hieroglyphics], I'd best begin by saying that *she* is. She is always in my mind, even when, owing to the pressure of circumstance, I am only conscious of her as a background. That sunny hair of hers—only, I wish Kate would n't wear it done up in about forty-seven puffs. I always catch myself wondering how many are hers and how many are acquired for the occasion. Once when she wore her hair in a soft, low knot, she looked exquisitely natural. Why are n't women content with looking natural? They can't beat Eve. I suppose it is because they want to look as though they had every charm that's going.

I like the way her blue eyes flash up at me—always so unexpectedly. They give a fellow a sort of electric shock—the kind he likes to get. Kate's nose is too small for character; but I like it. She has an adorable little, Kate way of pulling her tiny pug down when she lectures me.

I wonder whether she knows that I am now admiring her back. I know she is laughing, for I can see her shoulders shake; and when Kate laughs I am done for—I always want to kiss the dimples, and she knows it. Then, why does she laugh so often, when I am not privileged to kiss them? Miss Sanders has a pretty mouth; but *she* has an ugly birthmark on her upper lip. I never could see any beauty in a blemish, though all the boys think Miss Sanders is a beauty. Kate does n't like her—and she can't endure Kate. They say the season's belles never do like each other!

Kate is wondering at this moment what I am writing—whether it is one of what she calls my barbarous criticisms of her charming self, or, perhaps, whether it is the long-delayed proposal. Kate's too clever not to know how it's been with me this long time. Why don't I take courage and risk it instead of waiting for that silver mine to turn out a success? But then, Kate is n't used to hardship,

and I'm not able to gauge her altogether—yet. I don't know how far she'd go for the real thing. Even after three years of comradeship, a fellow can't be sure of Kate's next move.

However, she is going to the cotillion to-night; and then, if I can give her Aunt Maria a sleeping potion, or if I can lure Kate into a corner of the conservatory where that confounded, omnipresent Morris fellow won't hunt her up—Oh! I forgot Miss Sanders will be there and I am supposed to dance the cotillion with her; but I'll ask Kate to let me bring her home and—

Walter's eye roved to his watch.

“Time!” He rose and replaced it in his pocket. “Ten minutes, Kate!” He stepped to the desk, the paper in his hand. “You said it was an age since I had humored you. Now, here is my mind, written out to order. I scarcely dare hope you'll like it. Where's yours?”

The girl lifted her slowly crimsoning face as he bent to slip the page from beneath her fingers.

“Why, Kate! The sheet is blank!”

“Yes,” she stammered, struggling to hide her confusion; “yes. I could n't write what I was thinking of for you to read; and I promised to play fair, and so”—she held out the page he had offered—“here is yours back again. I have n't earned the right to read it, and we're just back where we were before. You see, you were right, Walter. I could n't stand ten minutes of it.”

The man bent nearer. “Do you care to see what I have written, Kate?”

“Yes.”

“Then, read. Your one word of admission may be worth my whole sheet.” He watched the wave of scarlet flooding her temples as the girl hurriedly scanned the written page. A carriage stopped beneath the archway.

“Aunt Maria!” she whispered.

“Kate, will you let me bring you home from the cotillion to-night?”

The blue eyes flashed up at him with the old, unexpected light. The short, upturned nose pulled down in the approved Kate fashion as she hesitated a moment; then dimpling to meet his imploring gaze: “I wanted you to ask me,” she said. “I was going to begin my confessions with that. Will one word make up, if the word is ‘Yes’? And, Walter, don't keep me in the background—I don't want to be a background. I—”

The little silver clock on the mantel peacefully ticked the seconds, and long leaping tongues of flame flickered upon two quiet figures on either side of the fire as Aunt Maria came briskly up the stair.

THE BURDEN OF THE TULKKI

By E. Young Wead

TO the townsmen of Abo, that picturesque seaport of Finland, the Tulkki—recently come as care-taker of the venerated old cathedral—was more priest than janitor, or guide. At all hours of day and night the poor and the unhappy, the rich and the penitent, flocked to his cell, back of the large audience room, asking aid and comfort—and none, it was said, ever left his presence without renewed hope. Yet mystery claimed him. Who he was, where he came from, what his purpose in accepting this almost menial position, none knew. It was a time of stress in Finland, when men for love of country did strange things. It was wise to know little, hence the Tulkki, Finnish to his heart's core, came and went on errands of mercy, or of unknown import, and none cared to question him.

To-night he sat alone, reading his Bible. His day's work was done, his frugal meal over, and he was free to ponder the words of the Blessed Book.

Hearing a knock, he rose to admit his visitor. It was some poor soul in need of help, he must open the door quickly.

The guttering tallow dip in the candlestick he held threw a faint light on the steps outside, disclosing a short, rather handsome man with shrewd gray eyes and threadbare clothes, standing half-uncertainly, awaiting an invitation to enter. At sight of him the Tulkki's eyes glittered, hard lines gathered about his mouth, the hand which held the candlestick closed convulsively, until the brass ring cut into his finger. He hesitated only a moment, but it seemed ages before he could control his voice sufficiently to say, "Come in."

The religious was glad the room was but dimly lighted. He set the candlestick on the table and moved back into the shadows, while his hand involuntarily smoothed his white hair and settled his green goggles.

"I am Pekka Lallukka," volunteered the stranger, glancing around the walls with insolent curiosity. "No doubt you have heard of me. I am very well known."

"Sit, Pekka Lallukka," replied the Tulkki. But he himself did not sit. He strode up and down the narrow room with clenched hands and labored breath.

In a tone of disappointment, Pekka began: "I have lost my position

with the Russian government. I am hard pressed to support my wife and child."

Almost smiling, the Tulkki paused in his restless pacing. "When did this happen?"

"Soon after you became care-taker here." He crossed his knees and looked up with a patronizing air. "My friends advised me to come to you."

Finnish silence was his reply.

"They say you find work for everybody. When one is sick or in trouble, you help him." Pekka's tone became petulant, as if he grudged the praise he felt was necessary.

At last the Tulkki spoke. His voice was low and flute-like, his accents slow and measured. "I fear I can give you no assistance."

Pekka looked up, startled. His face grew white and tense, lines of pain gathered about his mouth. "Don't say that! Don't leave me without help! Have mercy! My poor wife will starve, my little Yrjo will die. For the love of Heaven, assist me! You aid the meanest; why not me?"

"The meanest? Yes." The Tulkki spoke hesitatingly. "No one is beneath my aid. But others have been repentant, while you—are proud of your shrewdness, you glory in deceit, you have sold your soul to the devil and triumph in your own disgrace. How can I offer help to—you?"

The young man rose in consternation. Drops of sweat stood on his forehead. Like a hunted animal, he looked for a means of escape. Seeing the door, he slunk guiltily toward it, and with his hand on the knob, called out, "You are a wizard, or the devil himself," and ran out.

The inscrutable man left behind smiled and went back to his Bible; but he could not read. His jaw set in an ugly way, and his frame grew stiff. For several moments he sat thus, then a flood of color swept over his face. His hand dropped on the open book, and he bent his head in an agony of supplication.

"Not on me, O Father—I am not fit. Lay not on my soul the burden of this man's redemption."

The next night Pekka came again, his head bowed in shame. "I was wrong; I come to acknowledge my fault. Give me the shirt of haircloth, the girdle of thongs; give me the wooden shoes with nails under my feet; for all these things have I seen on your wall. When I have done penance, I may hope to escape starvation." He glanced stealthily toward his mentor.

The Tulkki eyed him sternly and his lip curled. "Penance without repentance is a balky horse that will not carry you far. For what sins will you suffer?" He drew himself up till his tall form overshadowed his visitor and compelled an honest reply.

"I—I deceived my wife, but"—Pekka wavered—"other men do that."

The Tulkki set his face like flint. "How?" His piercing eyes held the young man's glance.

Pekka's face filled with dread. He turned his head from side to side, as if this digging in the grave of memory was hateful. Dropping his eyes, he whispered: "I revealed secret political meetings. They were forbidden by the Russian government. Could I help it if her father was killed and her brother exiled? They defied the law, and deserved what they got. It was n't my fault." His tone was defensive rather than defiant, and he restlessly moved his foot over the floor.

The Tulkki groaned, and his spare figure crouched as if to spring at the man's throat; but his eyes fell on the Bible lying open on the table, and he stood erect, though his fingers unconsciously pressed together, as if something yielding lay within.

"They trusted you, Judas, and you sold them for a piece of gold. What else?" His eyes burned like coals.

"It was a long time ago—four years or more." Pekka spoke resentfully. "It was before we were married. Helmi had another lover—a Finnish patriot." His tone was derisive.

"Ah-h!" ejaculated the Tulkki.

"It was the night of the peasant ball at Abo. The Czar's manifesto revoking Finland's freedom had just come, and every one mourned. No one could dance, and he—Einor Pilvi—called a great meeting of the people. He had a silver tongue." Pekka shut his mouth stubbornly.

"And then," the Tulkki took up the tale, "a hundred men pledged themselves to go through cold and darkness, over ice-lakes and snow, through almost impenetrable forests, to get signatures from every man in the kingdom for an appeal to the Czar. The five least accessible provinces—those on the arctic circle—Pilvi kept for himself. This is history. Go on." The Tulkki's tone was commanding.

"The fool! On his way back, he—disappeared." Pekka surveyed his finger-nails shudderingly.

The Tulkki leaned toward him. "You did it!" he hissed. "You—you murderer!"

Pekka looked up suddenly. "I loved Helmi." A gleam of triumph crept into his eyes. "I won her." He raised his head and straightened his back. "I have a way. She thought the petition mine."

The Tulkki turned on his heel. "Come."

Pekka followed into the great room of the cathedral. The Tulkki took from the wall the historic flail of Finland—used until recent years to drive the devil from the church.

"Take off your coat!"

The young man obeyed.

"You punished others, punish now yourself." The Tulkki handed the flail to his visitor. Pekka received it in silence, his head bent toward the floor.

"Now strike!" On the Tulkki's face was no shadow of doubt or relenting.

Lightly Pekka threw the flail over his own shoulder, wincing when the swing struck his back.

"Harder!" The self-constituted priest stood stern and erect, like an avenging minister of Heaven.

The guilty man struck harder.

With eyes that fastened guilt on Pekka's soul, the Tulkki watched his victim; saw him stumble over the floor, shrink at each blow, groan with pain, and at last shriek as the bruised back showed blood; then he said quietly:

"It is enough. The holy instrument of torture will better your fortunes. I have a friend who to-morrow will give you work. Beware that you sin not again."

He helped the suffering man to put on his coat and sent him out into the starry night. Then he locked the door, and, kneeling on the bare floor, wrestled long in prayer. When he rose his face glowed with the martyr's triumph. He removed his coat and shirt, took down the flail, and struck his own back. He wielded his weapon with a fierce joy; he laughed at the rain of blows, and only when the blood flowed freely did he desist. He returned to his room, put on the hair-cloth shirt, and opened his Bible.

A month passed. The Tulkki's face grew thinner from fasting, and he hobbled painfully in the wooden shoes. Then one night there came again a knock, and he bowed his head in supplication.

When he opened the door, it was Pekka who entered. The young man's habitual air of importance had given place to one of dread. He spoke in a loud tone, as if to bolster courage.

"I lost my position to-day and came back to you. Your medicine's bitter, but effective. Give me more, and send me again to the sunny valley of Success."

The Tulkki eyed him sharply. "I gave you opportunity to work for Finland and truth. Could not my pain keep you faithful? What have you done now?"

"Nothing—much." Pekka became sullen.

The Tulkki pointed a long forefinger. "Go!"

Pekka began to entreat. "It was really not much," but he spoke in a shaking voice. "Debts pressed. The Russians wanted Hakli. I found him. It's only one more man in the mines."

The Tulkki tightened his girdle of thongs. "Come!"

In the centre of the great cathedral floor he raised a trap-door of iron. Slowly by the dim light of the candle he descended the ladder-like steps, followed by his companion. They entered a long, low vault which rumor said possessed the remarkable power of preserving bodies. Rows of dead lay on either side.

Pekka shuddered.

The Tulkki stopped and held up the candle. "You must sleep in this box beside Eric. People say it was occupied by Sigismund of Sweden, but the devil stole him away in the night."

Pekka shrank away. "They look as if they might walk—or speak." His face was pale, his eyes roamed through the vault.

"Some say they do, though I never saw them. Get in!"

With shaking legs, Pekka climbed to his place in the empty coffin. He tried to lie down, but his teeth began to chatter. "I can't! I can't! Some of them might touch me. They have fingers of ice, I know. I heard a groan from the corner"—he pointed to a spot where the shadows were thickest. "Something's coming. I see it—let me out—let me out!" He sprang from the box, brushed past the Tulkki, and fled toward the stairs. Darkness caught him, and he ran back, shrieking. Throwing himself on his knees before the Tulkki, he implored mercy.

"Take me away! Take me out! Give me any punishment but this. I'll die if I stay here! I'll die, I'll die—I'll—die!" He covered his eyes with his fingers and leaned against his tormentor's knees.

The Tulkki shook him off, and swiftly brushed his garment where the man's head had touched. Then he raised his candle. The faces that he saw were pale, not ghastly. With their plump cheeks, their unshrunk eyes, they might almost have been alive.

"Cheer up, man," he said contemptuously. "They're only asleep. A light always burns in the mummies' vault; they'll waken soon." His voice grew solemn. "There's no other way. This is the Siberian mine of your soul. Through fear, you may win salvation."

The finality of his manner, the fatality in his quiet tones, stilled the shaken man. He crept back and lay down.

The Tulkki closed and locked the vault door and dropped the trap with a bang. A moment he stood listening, a smile on his face, then reached for the flail.

In the morning, the Tulkki, gaunt, haggard, and sleepless, smiling when the hair-cloth shirt rubbed his bleeding back, released the half-crazed Pekka. He led the trembling creature to his own bath, refreshed him with *ragbrod* and *tkalje*, the simplest food and drink of the people, then sent him forth to a good position. "Go! And remember that Finland is a strawberry, all other lands are bilberries."

Months passed and again Pekka came. He was illy clad and stag-

gered weakly. The Tulkki was wearing the long robes of a monk, his face was pale and emaciated.

"Why did you come? Could you not wait till to-morrow? Then I should have been gone. Why do you torment me?"

Pekka's eyes sought the floor. "Men bring it on themselves," he muttered. "They are traitors to conspire against the government. Russia is generous; she paid a large sum for my news. I meant to take Helmi and go to the States, but somehow the money is all gone. Nothing is left." He raised his eyes desperately and faced his judge.

The Tulkki gave him a look of contempt and turned away.

Pekka followed and seized his hand. "Once more, just once more! Put me to sleep with the dead," he shook in remembered terror; "or give me the flail for my back. When I have wept blood, my hands will be clean."

The Tulkki smiled a bitter, hopeless smile. "It is not sufficient. You have been tried and found wanting."

He took from the rafter a loaf of *halkaka*, the hard black bread of the people, and led the way out of the ascetic gloom of the cathedral chamber into the darkness of the night. Down a long avenue of sombre pines they passed to the shore of the river. The vastness of the wide canopy of heaven, unbroken by mountain or hill, increased the loneliness of the two weird men.

From a covered shed on the margin of the river, the Tulkki drew forth a boat. "Enter!"

The fierce gleam in his eyes fell on the already terrorized wretch, who shrank back.

"Get in! It is too late now for either to withdraw. I have done what I could. When I might have saved you, you would not. The hand of the Lord is on us both. Get in!"

Propelled by the monk's strong oar, they glided swiftly to the island where stood the ruined castle in which, centuries before, Eric the Fourteenth had been poisoned. The one window of Eric's cell was heavily barred, the floor was of earth, the walls were twelve feet thick. A rickety bed stood in one corner and near it a harness of chains.

The Tulkki lifted the harness and handed it to Pekka. "Put it on. Lock the handcuffs, the collar, the belt, the anklets, and give the keys to me."

Obediently Pekka turned the keys in the little locks and handed them one by one to his jailer. Silently, almost mournfully, the Tulkki received them. Placing the loaf and some *ikalje*, the black wine of the country, on the floor beside the bed, he turned to leave. Something in the act struck suspicion to the heart of the shivering wretch. His eyes grew wide, his face white. He moistened his lips with his tongue.

"Don't go!" he begged. "Don't make me stay here alone!"

The mournful look on the Tulkki's face deepened, but he made no reply.

Pekka began to tear at his bonds. "You're going to leave me here to die!" he shrieked. "I know it—I feel it! I'll never see Helmi again—or little Yrjo! I will not stay!"

He threw the weight of his body against the chains, but they rattled derisively. Beads of sweat stood on his forehead. He tried to slip off the hand-cuffs. "Give me the keys! Unlock this harness! Oh, you villain—coward—murderer!"

The Tulkki crossed himself. "The Lord has given to you the portion you have meted to others. His will be done."

"But not this—not this—not death—here—alone—starving—where no one will find me. Oh, I repent, I repent!" His nostrils dilated, and he convulsively opened and closed his mouth; his protruding eyeballs were fixed on his captor, then suddenly he fell back unconscious.

The Tulkki glided from the room and locked the door. Hardly knowing what he did, he drew a crucifix from his breast and kissed it.

The following morning, hardly able to stand, he completed his arrangements for leaving the cathedral. He said to his followers, "I have made a fault. I must go to the monastery."

As he turned for a last look at the room which had been his home for a year—his Gethsemane—a woman tapped gently on the door. Unwillingly the monk admitted her. Throwing back the coif which shaded her brow, she disclosed a thin, anxious face, dominated by bright blue eyes, intelligent and pleading. She looked like a frail spirit from the other world, made human by those wonderful eyes.

The monk started. Involuntarily he cried out, "Helmi Lallukka, what do you here?"

At the sound of his voice the woman gazed at him. Her steady glance pierced his disguise and reached to his very soul.

"Einor Pilvi! You here—you the Tulkki!" She moved near and looked up into his face. "You cruel? You a tormentor?" Then indignation came. "You brute! This is revenge!" She raised her head and, clasping one long, slender hand in the other, she burst out, "Where is my husband? I have come for him."

"Helmi," he spoke softly, and the yearning in his eyes made her turn away, "do you reproach me? After all these years, can you give me nothing but the word that is like a blow?" His caressing voice followed her, and she bent her head.

"It is not revenge, little Poulukka." He put his hand over his eyes to shut out her beautiful face. He must think how to spare her the knowledge of Pekka's guilt and at the same time make clear his inevitable punishment.

"It is not revenge. It is not my wish. It is the will of God. Do

you think I like it? Do you think I do not suffer?" He brought her the wooden shoes. "See, with these nails I have trod on my heart. With this girdle"—he showed the leathern thongs—"I have strangled hate. I have prayed that this deed might not be mine. Now I go to Valamo—to atone." He drew forth the crucifix and held it before her.

"Is Pekka—dead?" she breathed, her eyes dilating. "Have you killed him—the father of my boy?" She stood so close that he could hear the tumultuous beating of her heart.

"I have obeyed the will of the Highest. You will see him no more." He replaced the crucifix, and his full sleeve brushed her face. He heard her catch her breath, then felt her hand on his arm.

"Where is my husband? Tell me!"

"I cannot."

She staggered to a chair.

He followed. "Helmi"—in his eyes gleamed fanaticism fostered by solitude; he struggled for the fitting phrase—"Pekka's soul was black. He confessed it. He did penance. He fell. God is not mocked, we must bow to His will." He laid a gentle hand on her head, but she shook it off and rose.

"EINOR"—she raised eyes of entreaty—"you loved me once. If then I had done you a wrong, would you have slain me? When we stood that night under the birch, while the stars twinkled and the cuckoo sang and you kissed me good-by for the last time, would you have killed me then?" The blood leaped to his cheeks, and he leaned toward her. "You would n't, you would n't! I see it in your face." She clasped her hands and raised them before him.

"Is the heart of the Lord less kind than yours?"

Her voice sank to a whisper and her eyes dropped. "Pekka has been good to me, and—I love him. If he has done ill, it was for me. I forgive him. Will not our God forgive?" She dropped her hands on her breast, but her face, holy with the effort of love, was upturned to heaven.

The Monk's cheeks caught the glow. He seized her hands and for a moment held them tenderly.

"You are right, O Dream of my Life! You have learned the wisdom of the angels. Here are the keys. You shall go to yonder old castle yourself and deliver him."

She smiled gratefully. "And you?"

"I go to Valamo. I will do penance for two."



EVERY MILLIONAIRE HIS OWN EXPERT

By Edgar Saltus

A CONTEMPORARY—more or less esteemed—complains that American artists prefer to live abroad, and that in purchasing their wares our millionaires are obliged to rely on expert assistance. After all, why not? Besides, though the complaint is entered, no explanation is made and no remedy offered. These omissions it is but a duty to supply. Here they are.

Local society is composed of two classes: the superselect and the rest of the world. The artist here is one of the rest of them. In France he is somebody. He has his crosses, of course, but they are those of the Legion of Honor.

These honorifics, of which the badge is a ribbon worn in the button-hole, are very useful to those who have not got them. The last time I was in a Paris theatre I lost the check for my overcoat. I was asked what sort of coat it was. I said there was no ribbon in the buttonhole. It was produced instanter. It was the only one of the kind in the place. How I thanked God then that I was not an artist! Shortly I was even more grateful. I went to the Salon.

The Salon is the nursery of such art as Paris has and incidentally of the sin of it. You find there mile after mile of improbable nymphs, smeared with vaseline, pictured by pastry-cooks and punctuated, at leisurely intervals, by something not entirely worth turning your back on. A promenade before these delicacies is eminently hygienic. Two hours of it succeeded by massage is excellent for obesity. No doubt a bicycle is better, but that is no longer modish. Even otherwise, there should be something for every taste, however unfastidious. There should be something for millionaires.

And there is. Only, to get it, hired aid appears to be requisite. That is all wrong. Every millionaire should be his own expert. Nothing is easier. But two things are needful. One is ears; the other, eyes.

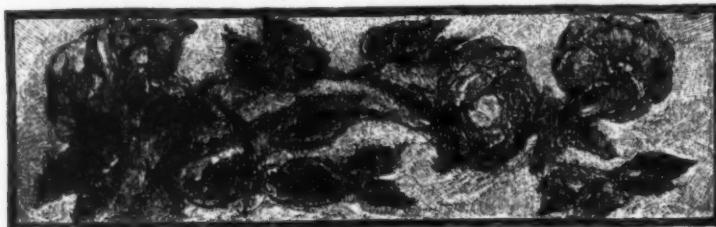
Ears first. Should a millionaire hear that an artist is regarded by his colleagues as an idiot and a brute, he may be sure that the man has

great talent. Should he hear him described as a chap of much promise, he may be equally sure that his wares cause no envy and never will.

To these ratings, an ability to differentiate between skies and grasses should be added, and, that accomplished, at a glance any millionaire can tell what's what.

If, for example, he sees a painting in which the sky is gray and the grass ditto, offhand he may decide that it is the work of an old master. If the sky is blue and the grass is green, then the artist is a young amateur. If the sky is green and the grass is blue, he is a realist. If the sky is yellow and the grass purple, he is a colorist. If the sky is black and the grass is red, he is an impressionist. If the grass is rectangular and the sky octagonal, he is a cubist. But if the grass is problematic and the sky such as never was seen before—or behind—he is a futurist and a genius.

These signs are infallible. Millionaires who memorize them may go abroad, they cannot go astray.



THE CHERISHED

BY ARTHUR WALLACE PEACH

HER home was quaint and quiet,
Some distance from the street,
And o'er it vines ran riot,
Around were flowers sweet.

The older people called her
“A spinster” in a way
That made it seem a sad thing
To be alone and gray.

But one wee lad who loved her
(Her sugar cookies, too)
Thought God had made his spinsters
In number all too few!

MR. WINKLER'S SIGNS

By Hattie C. Vaughan

“NOW, children,” said their father, as they gathered around the breakfast-table, “be careful to take up your knife first. Tommy!” All eyes turned, with varying expressions, to the little ten-year-old on whom the accusing gaze of the father rested. “There you go ag’in, right while I’m talkin’. Have I got to tell you every mornin’ ‘bout that ‘ere sign, ‘Fork first, day wasted’?”

“I did n’t mean to,” faltered the little fellow, shrinking under the reproof of the stern gray eye.

“It’s because he’s left-handed,” ventured Sadie.

“Well, that don’t mend matters none. See how the day was wasted yesterday. Everything he done did n’t ‘mount to nothin’: let the hawks git two of the chickens he was watchin’, only got one sack of potatoes dug, and forgot to feed the pigs till he’d gone to bed, and I had to rout him out to do it. Now he’ll have another day like yesterday.”

The children knew that Tommy’s yesterday had contained many kinds of work other than those enumerated, but they were wise enough to keep their thoughts to themselves. Their father—“Bob” Winkler—was well informed on but two subjects: signs and money-getting. Superstition was his predominating trait, and he regulated his conduct by a code of signs from the time when, before putting his feet out of bed in the morning, he counted twelve to insure good luck that day, till the evening, when he allowed no one to sweep the floor, for fear “the devil might come in.” If he saw the new moon for the first time over his left shoulder, he believed that misfortune would attend him that month, and could be averted only by his turning around three times immediately after the unfortunate sight. Spilling salt was another unlucky omen, and signified a quarrel with some friend. Old Betsy, the woman who for a meagre sum ministered to this peculiar household, was never surprised to be called upon to “throw some salt on the fire” as a preventive. Indeed, after living so long a time with the family, she was nearly as well versed in signs as her master himself, and if she ignored any of them, it was without his knowledge.

Eight years before, Betsy had come to help through the fatal illness of Mrs. Winkler—that is, she was informed by the husband that it was fatal, and, indeed, so it proved, though old Betsy believed it would

have ended otherwise with more attention to remedies and less to superstitious observances. That occasion was the first and only time she ever openly combated the decision of her employer, and he then harshly informed her that he had heard a dog howl the first night of his wife's sickness, and that was a sure sign of death, so it was no use getting a doctor.

In person, Bob Winkler was tall and angular, with retreating forehead, long, pointed nose, and small, quick, searching eyes; in spirit, he had the obstinacy and assurance that usually accompany ignorance and superstition.

Breakfast over, and the children dispatched to their several duties, Winkler prepared to take up the task he liked best—planning how to add to his already large store of worldly possessions. Standing in the front yard, he had just struck his heel to the ground three times—counting as he did so—when his neighbor from down the valley came walking up the path. A stranger would probably have shown evidence of amazement at Bob's strange conduct, which would in no wise have been diminished by an explanation. Not so Mr. Quigley; with a comprehensive glance, he genially advanced.

"Hello, Bob!" he smiled. "Been hearing a turtle-dove coo, have you? Well, you *are* a great one! You always know how to ward off the evil, any way."

"Oh, no; not nigh always," declared Mr. Winkler. Then impressively, "Some signs can't be nothin' done with."

"I suppose that's true," acquiesced Mr. Quigley, and diplomatically added, "I'm beginning to believe some in signs myself. Now, yesterday at dinner I dropped my fork, and, as sure as anything, I had a gentleman visitor that same evening."

"Sure, sure," beamed Mr. Winkler, delighted at the apparent conversion of his neighbor. "It always comes true unless something happens."

"By the way, Winkler," returned Quigley, without a smile, "my visitor of whom I told you was Bainbridge—you know—the owner of 'The Pines.' He ran up your bid on my horse by considerable—offered me fifty dollars more. Says she may not be worth two hundred to any one else, but he likes that peculiar dun color, and insists on having her."

"But"—explosively—"you sold her to me!"

"Certainly, certainly," agreed Quigley; "that's what I told him; but I said you might change your mind and not come at the time set, and, if so, he could have her. Nothing wrong about that, is there?"

"No, that'll do, but," declared Winkler positively, "I'll be there with the money at nine o'clock, just as I said I would. 'Course, I could get the cash and take her now, but I 'lowed to make what I get for my colts to-day pay for the horse, and the feller that bought 'em don't come till night."

"Oh, that's all right, Winkler," blandly declared his neighbor, apparently not in the least displeased at the arrangement. "I just wanted to make sure that if you did n't come by nine I could let him have her."

"Well, if I'm not there, he *can* have her; but, as I said afore, I'll be there all right."

Mr. Quigley bowed a smiling assent and briskly walked away.

That evening old Betsy—small, alert, quick-stepping—passed down the street on her accustomed trip to the little village. Half way there she met Mr. Quigley. His habitual smile widened into still broader lines as he solicitously asked after her health, and deftly continued the conversation. Betsy was not loath to be entertained by so affable a gentleman.

Their talk finally became confidential, with the result that she promised to perform a service for him, thereby adding a small sum to her meagre income. They seemed to get considerable amusement out of the plan, whatever it was, and went their ways in smiling anticipation.

In the meantime Mr. Winkler sold his colts, received the money, and went to bed, in satisfied contemplation of the morrow's purchase, first being careful to place his shoes with the toes to the south, that no burglar might enter his room that night. Mr. Quigley, in his home, and old Betsy, in her small corner of the Winkler domicile, each also sought repose. Sleep—the "sleep of innocence," as it is called—does it come with its beneficence to none but the honorable, the fair-dealing? If so, future punishment is not necessary; the penalty would be exacted daily. When the X-ray is perfected to the extent of revealing thought, what a scrambling for fig-leaves there will be!

The next morning the Winkler household was astir early, although this was not unusual. All were busy with their morning duties—all but the father; he could afford to loiter, with all the others working. Old Betsy seemed especially active, hurrying here and there, yet apparently alert for any unusual sound.

She must have had a "premonition," for soon her expectancy was rewarded. Something unusual *was* going on upstairs: doors slammed, and heavy, quick steps passed back and forth through the corridors, finally coming down the stairs and back to the kitchen. Suddenly Mr. Winkler came rushing in, in a manner quite foreign to his usual methodical stride. The boys, who were out washing at the sink preparatory to eating breakfast, came hurrying in to see what was wrong; Sadie looked wonderingly out of the pantry, where she had been cutting bread; and old Betsy glanced quickly up, but continued to stir the mush—it was no affair of hers, any way.

"Now, this is a pretty mix-up!" exploded the master of the house, tramping round the room excitedly, white-faced and wild-eyed, his thin, wiry hair standing out in disorder. "This is the mornin' to go for that 'ere horse, and there on the carpet in front of my bedroom door was

a pair of scissors!" Here Winkler looked up at Betsy, as if she were the more comprehending. "You know that sign:

"A sharp-pointed instrument before your door,
Don't venture out till after four,
Or in the strife
You'll lose your life.

"Now, what am I goin' to do about that 'ere horse, I'd like to know! I don't dast to go ag'in that sign—I've seen that tried too many times. Afore old man Hubbard got killed on the corn-sheller, they said he found a nail one mornin', and, in place of staying in the house all day, he just picked up the nail and went on to his work, and, sure enough, he got killed."

"But, Papa," timidly questioned Sadie, "he did n't die for a month after that, did he?"

"What does that matter?" demanded her father. "Who wants to die in a month, I'd like to know? I suppose that's what you learn to school. Then"—impressively—"I can tell you about your own mother. Afore she got sick, one day, we found a knife 'most to the pantry door. It must 'a' been meant for her, for she worked in there more than any one else. She would n't take warnin', and you see how it was."

"Papa, maybe some one dropped the scissors there by your door," ventured John.

"What's the difference how they got there? They got there for a warnin', did n't they? The thing to do now is to see what's to be done about that 'ere horse. I don't want to lose that, for it's a bargain at two hundred, let alone one-fifty, as I'm to pay, and Bainbridge 'll not miss a chance like that. I told Quigley he could let it go at nine o'clock if I was n't there with the money."

"Breakfast's ready," announced Betsy bluntly, and it was a silent group that gathered around the table. Mr. Winkler had subsided into pondering silence, heedless, for once, of his children's conduct.

Suddenly pushing back his chair, he ordered:

"John, saddle Dick quick as you can. I want you to go over to Quigley's and take him the money for that 'ere horse. Now, move!"

"Yes, sir," assented John, mightily pleased to be sent on such an important errand and perhaps escape school.

Soon he returned, leaving Dick tied at the gate.

The money carefully counted and wrapped, his father himself put it into the lad's pocket, tempering his son's ardor by insisting on Betsy's sewing it in.

"Now," dictated he, "you say to Mr. Quigley that I don't dast to come out of the house to-day, but I've sent the money by you, and you are to lead the horse back with you. Now, hurry!"

After John was gone, his father walked the floor in a fever of impatience, looking first out of one window and then another. He even opened the door and peered out, and if all the dangers lurked there that his imagination conjured up, his long, pointed nose would have invited attack, for certainly it protruded into the tabooed territory.

As the minutes passed, Mr. Winkler grew more and more anxious. Why did not John come? What was keeping him so long? He looked at the clock again—only three minutes since he had looked before? It must surely have stopped. Then he hurried to the window again. Yes, there was a cloud of dust—that must be John; but was that another horse with him? He could not really tell.

Winkler only realized now how very much he wanted that horse. The thought of Mr. Bainbridge as possible owner was torture, and it was a genuine groan he uttered as he grasped the fact that John had failed. But possibly—the inspiring thought came—the horse was to be kept for him till to-morrow. He met his son at the door, and anxiously demanded:

"Well, what did he say? Where is the horse?"

"He says," answered John, "that he's very sorry, but he had promised Mr. Bainbridge that if you did n't come by nine o'clock, the horse was his, and he asked if you were sick, and said that nothing but sickness was a reasonable excuse; and say, Pa, while I was out in the hall—he thought I'd gone home, but I was buttoning my coat up tight over the money—I saw him through the crack in the door—he winked at Mr. Bainbridge, and I heard him say, 'I was sure the scissors would do the work.'"

The flush of anger that overspread Mr. Winkler's face during the first part of his son's speech gave way to a look of astonishment, then incredulity, and finally one of comprehension. Without a word, he turned and went to his room.

After four hours, in which not a sound was heard, he came out and went about his work as usual, but it was supposed that during that time of quiet thought he bade good-bye to his lifelong delusions, for often after that he would say, with that pompous, assertive air habitual to him, "There's nothin' in signs; they can all be explained away somehow."



A LION WITH A FORKED TAIL

By Edith Robinson

“I WISH to apply for membership in the Society of the Dames of the *Arbela*. My ancestor came from England in that ship, the first sent by the Massachusetts Bay Colony, landing in what was to be Boston, in the year 1630.” So stated Mrs. David Cameron, as her card had announced her to the President of the august society of Colonial antecedents.

“May I ask your ancestor’s name?” queried Mrs. Fielding, with an air of reserve.

“Smoothers,” answered the visitor promptly.

There was a moment’s pause, significant enough for an uncomfortable flush to rise to Mrs. Cameron’s face. She was a pretty little woman, dressed quietly and tastefully in a brown tailor-made suit.

“I do not recall the name on our ancestral list of membership,” answered Mrs. Fielding smoothly. “The Society of the *Arbela* Dames,” she went on, with icy distinctness—“possibly you have not been informed as to the requirements for membership—is composed, not merely of ladies whose ancestors may, it is true, have come over in the *Arbela*; but of those only whose forebears were of illustrious birth. ‘Dame,’ as you doubtless know, is a word significant in itself of quality, in distinction from ‘goodwife,’ a term applied to women of the laboring classes.” As she spoke, her glance strayed to a small framed parchment occupying the central space in the wall over the mantel-shelf. “My coat-of-arms,” she explained urbanely, as her guest’s eyes followed her own.

“I have n’t my glasses; I’m quite near-sighted,” returned Mrs. Cameron, peering, with much interest, at the elaborate blazonry.

“James Smethherst,” returned Mrs. Fielding, the value of each syllable rendered by her most distinct enunciation. “He was the scion of a proud and ancient family. We have had his lineage traced far back in the annals of English history. No expense was spared in the search. You perceive the device?”

“A lion with a curly tail, dancing on his hind legs,” assented Mrs. Cameron.

"Lion rampant, with a forked tail," corrected Mrs. Fielding, her voice taking an edge.

"I did n't know the difference," answered Mrs. Cameron, in a humble tone. "If I should meet a lion with a forked tail going home, I should n't know how to speak to him any differently from just a common, every-day lion!"

Mrs. Fielding looked at her guest sharply, but was unable to decide whether or not there was ridicule of the Smethherst lion in Mrs. Cameron's tones. The latter went on:

"My grandfather emigrated from New England to Western Pennsylvania; before that, our family had lived in New England clear back to the time of the first settlement. We used to talk so much about New England in Paradise! As soon as we had money enough, I persuaded Mr. Cameron to come home, as we always called it. We are going to build, but I thought I would not wait to get acquainted till I had a big house. My landlady—we're boarding at Mrs. Jessup's—said that nobody was anybody in Millbank unless she belonged to the Arbela Dames. I don't know that I was so anxious to belong to an exclusive social organization," continued Mrs. Cameron frankly, "but I felt that as I was deeply rooted in New England, it would be beautiful to meet others who loved her as I did. It would be like one big family—feeling that her soil and institutions were part of our rightful inheritance, won by our own great-grandfathers from the savage and the wilderness; to be handed down to our children and our children's children, intact, perhaps with increase;" the little woman's voice trembled a little with the last words. "New England has always seemed to me the centre and source of the power of this great country," she added, "the storage battery for the rest of the nation. How much more strongly must you feel it, who have always lived here!"

"I have acquainted you with the conditions of membership in the Arbela Dames," said the President icily, as her guest took leave.

"Fancy any one with a name like Smoothers applying for admission," said Mrs. Fielding at the next meeting of the "Dames."

"I understand from my cousin, Maria Hastings—she boards at Mrs. Jessup's, you know—that Mrs. Cameron's father, although himself a mere 'puddler,' whatever that may be, had her carefully educated," hazarded Mrs. Morley, the secretary. "Mr. Cameron came from Scotland, and is a graduate of St. Andrew's University. He began life as a common miner, but soon acquired a competence. They seem rather desirable people," she added tentatively.

"It takes more than one generation to make a lady," returned Mrs. Fielding, in her loftiest tones. "We, approved of gentle blood, must see to it that the standard of true gentility is maintained, or society would sink to the level of the Smootherses!"

"It is all very well for Susan Fielding to have a leading voice in the society's affairs—I know she's up in Parliamentary laws and has a 'presence' that enables her to preside well," said Mrs. Morley afterwards, to one or two other members of the "Dames" less affected than others by the President's lofty lineage. "It's all right for her to use her coat-of-arms on her china, her stationery, and her automobile; but when she tries to run all Millbank on the strength of that lion with a forked tail, I think it's time some one reminded her that in a country like America such distinctions are out of place and in bad taste." No one, however, seemed ready to take upon herself the proposed task, and the lion, unrebuked, continued to prance and curl his tail—occasionally to show his teeth—in the little social world of Millbank.

For a day or two after her call at "Herst Hall," Mrs. Cameron preserved an unwonted silence. Then, one evening, when she and her husband were alone in their own room, she broached the subject with which her mind was evidently filled. David Cameron had never refused a request of the little woman who had married him, he was wont to declare, "with a pick on his shoulder."

"Everybody speaks so reverentially of Mrs. Fielding's coat-of-arms," she began. "You heard Miss Hastings say, at dinner, that it was the only one in town? We never heard that sort of thing mentioned in Paradise; but I suppose, in an older society, like Millbank, things are different. David, I should so like to have the Smoothers coat-of-arms carved over the drawing-room mantel-shelf in our new house! To be sure, we have n't it at present. But Miss Hastings said there were people in England who would look up your family, and it nearly always turned out that you had an ancestor in the nobility; if you could afford it," she added, rather ambiguously.

"If you want a bigger house, a new automobile, a diamond tiara, or an aeroplane, you shall have it," returned David. "But as for a coat-of-arms, we left all that on the other side of the Atlantic. Your ancestor of the *Arbela* came to this country, like many another good man of his day and our own, to better his condition. But as to 'family'—in the sense we use the word in the old country—there were few of the early immigrants who had the right to a coat-of-arms that a College of Heraldry would admit. It's a bit ridiculous to hear all this stuff and nonsense about one's family 'going back' three hundred years, when there are those in Scotland who can count three thousand," said the Scotchman, scorn in his usual even tones.

"It seems to be only a matter of money," murmured Mrs. Cameron, loth to give up the pleasing idea.

"Quite so," answered her husband dryly. "The number of Americans descended from the English nobility is increasing yearly. Those

rough early days brought out splendid sterling qualities in our grand-sires and granddames," he went on in a different tone, "that it is a good thing to recall and honor, as all these 'Revolutionary' and patriotic societies doubtless aim to do; but an enormous amount of snobbery has got mixed up in the business, and it strikes me that the good ladies of Millbank are on the wrong tack in their glorification of their Colonial sires," concluded the Scotsman.

"But one can't be in society here unless she is an 'Arbela Dame,'" urged Mrs. Cameron, faintly impressed by the sterling good sense of her husband's words, but loth to surrender her social aspirations.

"Then we'll stay outside," answered David composedly. "The Jim Smoothers I knew—your father," he went on—"was a brave, honest man, who never took his hand from the plough nor looked back once he had set it to the furrow. I've no doubt that that first Jim Smoothers, who landed hereabouts in the year 1630, was of the same stuff—else he could scarce have sustained himself in a new country; nor his family prospered and multiplied. He was the sort of man this nation was built up upon, not the run-out scions of nobility. I'm proud to have married into the stock!"

"That's a prouder thing for me to hear than to own a whole menagerie of lions with forked tails," answered his wife firmly.

A few afternoons later, she called upon Mr. Bates. Mrs. Bates had just been taken to the hospital for an emergency operation. The threatened danger was over, but it would be some time before she would be at home again. Margery Bates, who was about to graduate from the Grammar School, would have to forego the muslin frock she was to have worn on that occasion. The child was evidently struggling with the greatest disappointment of her life, to which a tender conscience forbade expression. Mr. Bates, still dazed from the late crisis, was evidently helpless before this minor emergency. Mrs. Cameron would attend to the purchase of the little frock; and—she was boarding and had much leisure time on her hands—it would afford her real pleasure if she were allowed to make Margery's dress herself. She left behind a happy little face—and the knowledge that the doctor's bill would press less heavily.

A little later she said:

"There's no need of that child's being a cripple!"—although Johnny Mason, the grocer's son, had hobbled from birth. And only waiting his mother's consent, she whisked the boy to the city in her automobile in time to have the new operation performed by the wonderful foreign surgeon in his brief Eastern visit. And now Johnny was looking forward to joining, some time, the school Eleven!

"There is something so startling, so suggestive of the log cabin and the schooner-wagon, in her methods," said Mrs. Fielding languidly.

"Why, I know to a certainty that she didn't even wait for Mrs. Bates or Mrs. Mason to call first!"

The minister and his wife, and Dr. and Mrs. Drummond, as in duty bound, had promptly called upon the new-comers; but for a time, the majority of people in Millbank held aloof. The President of the "Arbela Dames" had distinctly pronounced against them, and Mrs. Fielding's example had, for a time, many followers among those of "gentle blood." Nor was it without influence beyond that charmed circle. Time had been when "social distinctions" was an unknown phrase in Millbank. It was an old-fashioned town, where everybody knew everybody else, attended the same church, and shared one another's troubles and rejoicings in a neighborly, whole-hearted way. Now Mrs. Fielding and Mrs. Morley bowed distantly to Mrs. Jessup and Mrs. Mason; and referred to them and others as "tradespeople"—another term of recent introduction in Millbank.

It had been an unusually busy season with the Dames. Several important "papers" dealing with "Kitchen Utensils of Colonial Times" and "Head-dresses of Our Foremothers" had been prepared with great care and laborious research; and the restoration of certain tombstones in the old burying-ground had borne heavily upon the Society's funds. It was therefore perfectly natural and excusable that the "Dames" could not help in the doctor's scheme of ridding a certain poor district within the precincts of the town of mosquitoes by scientific methods of sanitation and drainage; or that the contribution sent by them to the Chelsea sufferers should be of the meagrest. It was said that Mr. Cameron's check to Dr. Drummond covered the entire expense of the "mosquito campaign"; while Mrs. Cameron, not content with her generous response to the minister's appeal, devoted herself personally to discovering and relieving the wants of the worthy and needy among those made homeless or destitute by the great fire.

The Camerons' house was finished at last, irreproachable in the finest Colonial architecture. Invitations for the housewarming had been issued, and the generous hospitality of host and hostess had not stayed within the charmed limits of "society."

"Mrs. Cameron seems to be a person impervious to gentle hints," said the President of the Arbela Dames thoughtfully. "So many parvenus have worked their way into good society by the mere possession of money that it behooves us of gentle blood to guard the inheritance of our forebears." Several Dames had come to afternoon tea at "Herst Hall" to discuss a situation that was generally felt to be a social crisis.

"Some of the ladies speak as though they would like to see the inside of the new house. They say it's magnificent," said Mrs. Morley.

"There is something that cannot be bought or sold," returned

Mrs. Fielding solemnly, raising her eyes to the blazonry over the mantel-piece. "Whatever may be the course of the other Dames, my decision is made. I shall send my 'regrets.'"

Notwithstanding this example, a goodly company had come together in the great house, and though at first there were surprised or inquiring looks, as one Dame greeted another, it became apparent, ere long, that the President was the only member of the Society who was absent! An atmosphere of cordial good-will pervaded the rooms, "social distinctions" were apparently forgotten, and everybody seemed to be having an unaffected "good time," just as in the old simple days of neighborliness and good will.

"Mrs. Cameron was so kind with her new books and magazines when Mary was ill!" "After Harry's accident, she sent fruit nearly every day!" "No one had ever thought before that the factory steam-whistle disturbed Mother when she had nervous prostration," said the little dressmaker. "Mrs. Cameron had it stopped, and Mother said it was like being transported to a new beautiful world of rest and peace!" "I don't know what I should have done last winter when I was suffering so from insomnia," said Miss Stone, the school-teacher, "if Mrs. Cameron had not come to the rescue. 'Just moving across the street is a help sometimes,' she said, 'when one cannot have a more radical change.' I did n't feel that I could afford a real vacation, but I'm sure those weeks in that beautiful room at Mrs. Jessup's, and the rides in Mrs. Cameron's automobile, did me just as much good."

By and by, whence starting none could say, the words were heard with growing frequency: "Have you seen——" and the speaker's eyes directed to one end of the room, where—the sole ornament of the wall over the mantel-shelf—was a small, modestly framed script, bearing the superscription:

List of the passengers of the *Arbela*, of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, landing at Shawmut, afterwards Boston, May 16, 1630.

A name on the appended list was outlined in red. As one after another of the company looked at the record, an expression of blank amazement was followed by one of incredulity, of questioning, not unmixed, in certain cases, with amusement.

It was Mrs. Drummond who asked, at last, the question that was hovering on the lips of all.

"My dear Mrs. Cameron," said she, "may I ask if the name in red on the passenger list is that of your ancestor on the *Arbela*?"

"Yes; James Smoothers, Servant," answered the hostess.

"Smeth-herst?" repeated Mrs. Drummond, enunciating the syllables with sharp distinctness.

"Is that the way you pronounce it in the East?" queried Mrs.

Cameron innocently. "We called it 'Smothers' in Paradise. 'S-m-e-t-h-h-e-r-s-t, Smothers,' she spelt. "Oh!"

Her amazed comprehension was repeated in the expression of the faces about her. It did not take long for the astounding situation to be patent to everybody in the room. There it was, in black and white, an incontrovertible fact, needing no genealogical expert to confirm. The despised and plebeian "Smothers," the exalted "Smethherst," "Servant" and the "scion of an ancient and noble family," were one and the same person!

"Why did n't somebody ever think to look up the passenger-list of the *Arbela*, and see who was who?" queried the Secretary of the "Dames," addressing the company, gentle and simple, impartially. "We've written all sorts of papers about things that might or might not have happened—most probably did n't," she interpolated, with damaging frankness—"but no one ever thought of condescending to take an interest in the plain facts." Somehow, honesty was in the air in the Camerons' big house.

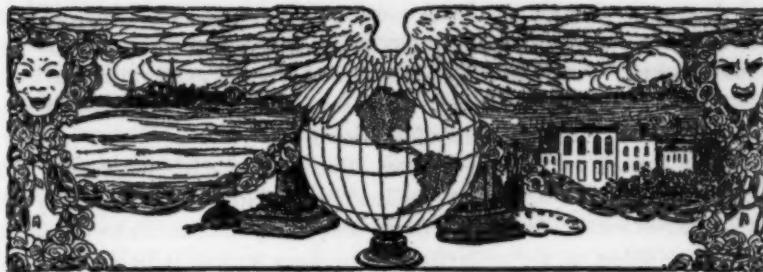
"At any rate, my spinning-wheel"—it was in her "drawing-room," formerly "parlor"—"is the real thing, if it did n't come over in the *Arbela*," murmured Mrs. Mason, holding her head a little higher.

"And so is my sampler," added Mrs. Jessup, who had also been denied admission into the ranks of the "Dames." She always referred to the sampler as the work of her "ancestress." Everybody in town remembered Aunt Mirandy Jessup, but in the prevailing mania for the Colonial, even one's great-aunt took brevet rank.

Of course the incident was not long in reaching the ears of Mrs. Fielding. A day or two after the Camerons' reception, the big red automobile with the emblazoned panels was seen before the newcomers' door.

"I was so interested to hear of the pleasant little discovery of the other evening," said the President of the "Arbela Dames" in her most dulcet tones. "Of course, in the levelling conditions of a new country, it is not difficult to understand how the descendants of a common ancestor should become of all sorts and conditions of men. A noble name is easily corrupted; and in the vernacular of a Western town, Smethherst readily became Smothers! As your distant kinswoman"—she paused impressively—"I wish to ask the privilege of seconding your petition for membership in the 'Arbela Dames,' as one approved of gentle blood."

"I withdraw the application," returned Mrs. Cameron composedly. "I thank you for your offer," she added, with gentle dignity, "but I prefer to approve myself of gentle blood by other evidence than partnership in a lion with a forked tail."



WAYS OF THE HOUR

A DEPARTMENT OF CURRENT COMMENT AND
CRITICISM—SANE, STIMULATING, OPTIMISTIC

STATE LIFE INSURANCE

THE State of Wisconsin has embarked in the business of selling life insurance, and the Legislatures of a few other States are considering a similar move.

There is, perhaps, no public service which a State government is less calculated to render effectively, nor one for which there is less need of State activity. In the past twenty years the number of Legal Reserve or Regular Companies has more than doubled. The fact that keen and unrestricted competition is maintained among them may be accepted as a guarantee of efficiency and economy in their management.

The advocacy of State life insurance is based on several fallacies, the chief of which is that an organization controlled by the government can adequately furnish the people with this almost universal necessity at less cost than can a private company. The assumption is that by employing State officials to write the business without remuneration, enough will be saved to make the rates attractive to the general public. The experiences of the governments of Great Britain and New Zealand in this field of endeavor indicate the futility of any such expectation.

What may be predicted of Wisconsin's experiment is that little business will be done by the State, and that what is done will be unsatisfactory to the insured. This because the history of life insurance proves conclusively that no considerable amount of it can be written without solicitation, and because it is a highly technical business which may not be intrusted to unpaid and untrained mail-carriers and factory-inspectors without certainty of mistakes and misunderstandings. For

this reason the business is likely to lapse at a wasteful rate, especially as no one will have a personal interest in keeping it in force.

But, even though the State avoids the payment of commissions, it must incur the expense of management, of medical examinations and distribution. Two obviously unfair measures—general taxation, or a levy upon the policy-holders of ordinary companies—may be employed to relieve the State's patrons of the burden.

Three other undesirable features attach to State life insurance. The risks are likely to be largely confined to one locality, a distinctly disadvantageous condition. The State does not guarantee its own policies, a serious defect in the protection. The management is liable to change on account of political influence, as the recent dismissal of Commissioner Eckern, after a few months' service, showed.

FORBES LINDSAY

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PLAY-GROUNDS.

THE pursuit of happiness—set forth in the great Declaration as one of the three reasons for instituting a new government—found slight official recognition in this country before the inception of the play-ground movement, about a decade ago.

It was the hard lot of city children, "with no place to play," that first drew attention to the significance between misdirected amusements and juvenile crime. Analysis of the court records made clear that the stifling of the child's normal instincts led directly to vice and mental delinquency. The next step was obvious, and within the past few years provision for public recreation has become as distinctly a municipal function as the supply of water or policing the streets.

So rapid, in fact, has been the progress of the play-ground movement that it seems not unfair to compare it to a beneficent conflagration, spreading from city to city. The annual survey for 1912, taken by the Play-Ground and Recreation Association of America, showed 533 cities having well-developed programmes of municipal recreation. This is the growth of about five years, as in 1907 less than a score of the principal cities had organized play-centres.

A new profession has developed along with the play-centres—that of the play-expert. In the 533 cities reported upon, there were 2,094 regularly supervised play-grounds, requiring the service of 5,320 expert play-leaders. Courses of training for this work have been established in various institutions, and the new profession has appealed to many college graduates, especially women. Social, no less than athletic, efficiency tells for success, as story-telling and folk-dances are as important as the physical competitions. A peculiar skill is required to direct the large groups of children under conditions quite reversed from those of

the school-room. Where play-centres were opened without this expert supervision, they seem to have accomplished little, and in some instances became a public nuisance.

Men and women of leisure, in various communities, have volunteered and given much time to the direction of the children in their play. But it is the skilled worker who must be relied upon here, as elsewhere, to secure permanent results. The Recreation Secretary is now, in most cities, the virtual creator of a new department. He devises the comprehensive plan for the entire city, supervises those in charge of the different play-centres, and carries the work forward. The time is not distant when the Director of Public Recreation will be as important a figure as the Director of Public Safety.

At the beginning of the play-ground movement, the financial support came chiefly from private sources. In recent years both municipal and State authorities have approved bond-issues or specific forms of taxation, taking over most of the burden. Chicago has spent about \$11,000,000 most judiciously, equipping small parks and recreation centres with elaborate gymnasiums, social and lecture halls, as well as industrial gardens and summer camps. New York is credited with having spent \$15,000,000 within ten years upon small parks and play-ground sites, not all, perhaps, as effectively.

The annual budget of Boston for all forms of public recreation is said now to exceed \$1,000,000; Philadelphia and St. Louis, including their expenditures for parks, swimming pools, and public music, are virtually as generous. Among the cities that have authorized bond-issues of \$1,000,000 or more for recreation purposes are Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Atlanta, Seattle, and Portland, Oregon. Even cities of the size of Grand Rapids, Michigan, are expending two to three hundred thousand dollars annually for this purpose.

A conservative estimate of the local expenditures throughout the country for play-grounds and official recreation since 1907 is said to be \$100,000,000. Those who remember that in the early stage of the movement "Tag Days" seemed essential to raise a few thousand dollars for play-grounds can well judge how great a conflagration a "little fire" has kindled.

WILLIAM HALE BECKFORD

SOLITUDE

BY J. J. O'CONNELL

BY day and night I walk the crowded ways.
Upon the surging throng I cast my gaze,
The human stream flows on—I feel alone.
And not one face lights up to meet my own.

THE AMERICAN RAILWAY INDUSTRY

By Edward Sherward Mead, Ph.D.

ARTICLE I.

GREATEST of all sources of investment is the American Railway. For forty years the transportation companies of the United States have poured into the world's investment market a flood of securities. The savings of Europe and America have found their largest single outlet in railway stocks and bonds. The volume of railway securities now outstanding presents a vast total. Of railway stocks there were outstanding at the close of 1911 \$8,582,000,000; of railway bonds, \$10,091,000,000. It is the largest single contribution to the world's savings. If we except the value of land, it exceeds, in size and value, all other forms of investment in the United States combined.

Of recent years railway investments have declined in favor. Other bonds and stocks have entered the competition; public hostility has been aroused against the railways. They have been subjected to severe regulation, denied the right to advance their rates, in many cases forced to reduce them. Long enjoying a monopoly of the investment market, railway directors have hesitated to meet the demand for high-interest bonds. They have halted and hesitated, postponing the inevitable surrender to the demand for securities paying more than four per cent.

We have here an explanation of the decreasing output of railway securities in recent years, and this, in turn, explains the slow progress of railway construction during the same period. Observe the figures. From 1880 to 1890 our railway mileage increased from 93,262 to 166,703; from 1890 to 1900, although this was a period of panic and depression, drouth and scanty harvests, the growth in mileage was 166,703 to 194,262; from 1900 to 1910, however, a period of enormous growth in the lines, the railway system increased 48,845 miles. In 1911 only 3,465 miles were constructed.

This small growth in mileage does not mean that American railroads are standing still. During the last decade they have spent, measured by the increase in their liabilities, \$6,719,000,000 upon their properties. The

expenditure has, however, been rather devoted to improving facilities than to building new lines. Immense tunnels, the Pennsylvania and New York Central in New York, the Northwestern at Chicago, costly projects of electrification, such as that carried through by the New Haven and Hartford, replacement of wooden by steel equipment, and large additions to equipment have absorbed available railway capital.

In recent years, from 1903 to 1907, 14,424 locomotives were put into service, and 536,942 freight and passenger cars. Each year's additions, moreover, are of larger locomotives and cars of greater cost and capacity. Vast sums have also been spent on the purchase of costly city real estate required for larger terminal yards. Track elevation, installation of block signals, reduction of grades, and elimination of curves have all taken substantial shares of railway funds.

The American railway industry, for its size, and considering the large number of companies operating it, is the soundest and strongest business in the world. Observe first the size of the plant and personnel: mileage, 359,000; cars, 2,408,589; locomotives, 65,310; employees, 1,699,420. Over 10,000,000 Americans draw their living from the railroads; and the business which is conducted by this great organization is worthy of it. In 1912 American railroads transported 1,817,562,049 tons of freight and 1,019,658,605 passengers. Expressed on a mileage basis, these figures are even more striking. Over every mile of American railroad in 1910 were carried 1,071,086 tons of freight and 138,169 passengers. This immense business was done, moreover, at a very moderate cost to the shipper and passenger, a fact proven by an average freight rate of .748 cent, and a passenger rate of 2.22 cents. No other industry, moreover, performs its service or furnishes its goods at so small a margin of profit. The passenger business, in the opinion of the best informed railway men, is operated without profits, and out of the three-fourths of a cent received for each ton carried one mile, it is a safe estimate that not more than one-fourth cent represents profit.

In spite of these small profits on each unit of business handled, the railway industry is highly profitable, owing to the great volume of the traffic. For the year ending December 31, 1911, the total profits of 246,655 miles of railroad operated were \$1,085,951,595, or, deducting taxes, \$972,237,934. The railway industry, on a gross business of about three billion dollars (\$2,848,468,965), makes a profit of nearly one billion dollars. A business which can show one dollar in three as profit over the cost of operation is properly characterized as the most profitable business in the United States. Even the United States Steel Corporation, generally recognized to be the most profitable of the large industrials, now that the Standard Oil and American Tobacco Companies have been dissolved, in its best year, 1907, on a gross business of \$757,014,767 showed \$177,201,561 of profits.

And this introduces us to the second characteristic of the railway industry, which especially commands railway securities to the investor. Not only is the railway business profitable, but its prosperity is continuous and its profits are therefore subject to very moderate fluctuations. In 1908, the year following one of the severest panics in our history, railway profits declined only 6.2 per cent., and in 1909 they more than regained the loss. In good times and in bad, railway profits not only hold their own, but tend strongly to advance. The reason for this movement of profits it is important to understand. The profits of a business depend primarily upon the demand for its products. If that demand is sporadic and intermittent, the business will be, as Andrew Carnegie said of steel, either "a prince or a pauper." If the demand is continuous, however, fluctuating within narrow limits, and always tending upward, and if the business shows a large margin over the cost of operation, we have what is from the investor's standpoint an ideal situation. Such a condition prevails in the railway industry.

There is a wide difference between the profits of railway transportation companies and manufacturing companies, the instability of whose profits we have just been considering. The demand for the products of a single industry is limited to a small portion of the total number of commodities produced. The demand for railway transportation, on the other hand, is represented by every commodity of commerce. The demand for transportation corresponds to the supply of commodities. The broader is the demand for the products or service of an industry, the more stable are its earnings. A large and diversified demand is but slightly affected by any influence, but if this influence is left to operate by itself upon the price of a commodity or service, it produces wide fluctuations. The withdrawal of ten thousand gallons from a standpipe appreciably affects the level of water in the pipe. Withdraw the same amount from the reservoir, and the water level is scarcely affected. This analogy may be applied to explain the stability of the demand—for railway transportation as compared with the demand for coal, sugar, or iron. The railroad company is patronized by the producers of every commodity. What it loses in freight earnings from a decline in price or supply of one group of products, is often more than regained by advances in others. The manufacturing company, on the other hand, by producing, at the most, only a small number of products, has usually less compensation for a decrease in demand. Its earnings usually, therefore, show a larger effect from a fall in prices.

The classified freight traffic of the Pennsylvania Railroad, for example, includes thirty-six general classes of freight, some of which comprise thousands of individual articles, and each one of which contributes to the \$153,564,528 of gross earnings which the company earned in 1909. Each one of these commodities is acted on by a variety of influences

which affect its demand or supply, and which, through these factors, influence the profits of its producers. The production of anthracite coal is reduced by a strike. As a result, the demand for bituminous coal is increased. A failure of the corn crop reduces the profits of the farmer and rancher. A cut in duties decreases the profits of the manufacturer, and a change in internal revenue duties affects the profits of the grower and distiller. Prices and profits are in a state of constant change. No manufacturing industry can be certain of its earnings a year hence.

From these disturbing influences, however, the railway company is, to a large extent, protected. The great variety of its traffic prevents rapid changes in the gross amount. What is lost on one commodity is often regained on another, and the total tonnage is not reduced. This is well illustrated by a comparison of the gross earnings of the Pennsylvania Railroad with those of the United States Steel Corporation. The one is the largest railroad system in the United States and one of the best managed, and the other is the largest and one of the best managed and best organized industrials. The steel corporation, moreover, manufactures a great variety of products, so that its demand would naturally be more stable than those of steel manufacturing companies whose profits are more narrowly specialized. It has also been able to maintain for long periods stable prices for most of its products, and its supremacy in the steel trade since its organization has only recently been challenged. Competition, until the winter of 1909, has very slightly disturbed it, and yet the fluctuation of its gross earnings, compared with the Pennsylvania Railroad, which appears in the following table, where the figures are stated in millions of dollars, is extreme. The figures for the Pennsylvania Railroad are as follows, stated in millions of dollars:

1902	112
1903	122
1904	118
1905	133
1906	148
1907	164
1908	136

and for the United States Steel Corporation as follows:

1902	500
1903	536
1904	444
1905	585
1906	696
1907	757
1908	482

The percentages of fluctuations from one year to another in the two companies are as follows:

	Pennsylvania Railroad	United States Steel Corporation
1902	15.15	...
1903	8.93	7.20
1904	3.28	17.16
1905	12.71	31.76
1906	11.28	18.97
1907	10.81	8.76
1908	17.08	36.33

Broadly speaking, the distinction which has been indicated between railway and manufacturing industries holds good wherever it is applied. The demand for the transportation services offered by some railways, especially those which depend exclusively upon iron and steel or kindred industries, is more irregular than those of some manufacturing companies—for example, gas or electric lighting companies or companies supplying certain food products which are regarded as necessities of life. But as between the two classes of corporations, railroads and industrials, the comparison of stability of demand favors the railroad, primarily because of the breadth of the demand for its products.

The railway industry is also distinguished by its comparative freedom from competition. What manufacturing industry has vainly tried to accomplish by unlawful combination, the railroads have achieved without conscious effort, solely by virtue of their economic position. This advantage will be the subject of the next article in the series.



KNOCKS AND ANSWERS

IT is hard lines to hear a witty fellow say the very thing you have been trying to.

Masculine: to tease.

Feminine: to teas.

THE thoughtful are amazed at the preponderance of good in the World.

GOOD resolutions are useful. They teach us how difficult it is to remould ourselves.

MANY dream of Happiness whilst the starry-eyed visitor knocks unheard at their doors.

